

## What is a Lectionary?

Did you ever wonder about the lessons we read each week in church? What is 'The Proper of the Church Year', as found in the Book of Alternative Services(BAS), page 261? It looks like a list of scripture references with some liturgical bits and pieces thrown in to complete the worship services that use these particular readings. And what is that "lectionary" people talk about? What does it all have to do with me?

The word proper means appropriate. The lists in the Proper of the Church Year tell us what has been appointed - or deemed appropriate - for that Sunday. The word "lectionary" means simply "an ordered reading of Holy Scripture". Therefore, *to follow the lectionary is to engage in a disciplined reading of scripture* according to the wisdom of the Church and what has been determined to be appropriate for both the time of year and the need of the people to hear the full message of the bible. In following the lectionary we read the difficult and challenging passages as well as the consoling and supportive ones. We engage in the fabric of our faith.

The systematic reading of Holy Scripture is very ancient. Some biblical scholars believe they can discern the structure of an older Jewish lectionary in the pattern of parts of the New Testament. Different lectionaries, evolved in the varied liturgical traditions of Christianity. *The churches of the Anglican communion inherited the Western (Roman) scheme of Eucharistic readings: Epistle and Gospel lessons for each Sunday and festival.*

The *commonality of our lectionary* to Roman Catholic and many Protestant churches can be traced to Pope John XXIII who convened the Second Vatican Council. One of the ways in which Vatican II "opened the windows" for the people was in the area of revising liturgy and worship. This was to include a revival of the central role of Scripture study in the devotional lives of the faithful--one that was nevertheless open to modern analysis and interpretation. A single coherent system of readings intended to engage the People of God with the deepest roots of their tradition was developed as a full lectionary cycle covers the significant stories and issues of the bible

In reading the same Scriptures every week through the lectionary cycle we can celebrate a common bond among the myriad of Christians around the world, The **Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)** was produced by a North American ecumenical body in the mid-1960s (Common Lectionary) and adapted in the early 80's (Revised Common Lectionary, RCL). In 1992 the Anglican Book of Alternative Services changed to accept the citations of the RCL which gives a scheme of readings for Sundays and feast days. It is found in the Proper of the Church Year. It is used by most main line denominations in North America and has been widely adopted in Great Britain and elsewhere.

So what does this mean to me? First, **users of the RCL will read the greater part of the Bible in three years.** How many times, then, have you heard the stories in the bible? The Lectionary begins with the first Sunday in Advent as that is considered the beginning of the *church year*. *Year A* (beginning Advent 2010, 2013, 2016, years evenly divisible by 3) concentrates on the Gospel of **Matthew**, while *Year B* focuses on the Gospel of **Mark**, and *Year C* on **Luke**. The Gospel of **John**

is read chiefly around Christmas, Lent and Easter, and during Year B as Mark is the shortest of the Gospels. Readings from the rest of the New Testament, the Old Testament and the Psalms complete the single coherent system of weekly readings.

The Book of Alternative Services (BAS) also provides *other guides* to the liturgical reading of Holy Scripture, particularly for weekday use. Clergy can, of course, depart from the RCL when they have specific liturgical needs or objectives. *A Daily Office Lectionary (DOL)* gives parishes, individuals and groups a scheme for daily devotions. It uses a two year cycle with Year 1 always beginning when the first Sunday in Advent occurs in a year divisible by 2. Many personal study guides such as the daily Bread and Forward Day by Day use this lectionary. These are available online and through the parish. Call the office (613-733-0336) for more information. There is also a *weekday Eucharist lectionary*, primarily used to determine the readings for Eucharistic services during the week, especially when they are for gatherings of the same people who might have been expected to attend the regular Sunday services. The *psalter* is the ancient hymnbook of the Jews. The psalms have been organized in lectionary schemes. They are read through frequently - in a month when following the Daily Office Lectionary and in Morning and Evening Prayer.

### **Resources**

The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada pp.262-265

**Note:** These introductions to the various sections of the BAS contain a wealth of information concerning our worship services and how and why we do things in church.

"Understanding the Sunday Scriptures" H. King Oehmig, D. Min, Read Mark Press,  
On-line see: [lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/](http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/) and [montreal.anglican.org/comment/](http://montreal.anglican.org/comment/)