

An Alternative Lectionary for Lent, Good Friday, Eastertide and Advent

Respecting Jews and Judaism Revisioning Church Refocusing Liturgical Seasons

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Frank Henderson's Page on Liturgy and Medieval Women

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INTRODUCTION

The merits and benefits of the modern liturgical lectionary are widely acknowledged. However, weaknesses, deficiencies and shortcomings have also been reported. These are also variously referred to as problems, questions, areas in need of improvement, or simply “issues.” It is these (or at least some of them) with which the present study is concerned. This study is also limited to the lectionary readings for Good Friday and the seasons of Lent, Eastertide, and Advent.

Here I bring together a number of such “issues” under the following three headings:

Respecting Jews and Judaism
Revisioning Church
Refocusing Liturgical Seasons

Although these might appear to be quite distinct matters, they in fact overlap and interact, and need to be considered all together.

I am aware that some persons deny that there are any such “issues”; for them the present liturgical lectionary has no faults and does not need any improvement. I disagree, for reasons that will be set forth below. Others may be conscious of one or another issue, for example ascribing responsibility for the death of Jesus to Jews, the relative invisibility of women, the limited number of readings appropriate for the conclusion of the catechumenate during Lent -- but may have only a limited appreciation of other issues. The significance of individual issues may also vary: one issue may be considered to be very important, others less so.

Following a brief review of the nature of the lectionary, I will describe the aims and approaches used in the present study, and then examine the subject of “issues” in greater detail. Responses to these will be considered, after which I offer alternative orders of readings.

THE LECTIONARY

Vatican Council II called for major changes in the use of Scripture in the Roman Catholic liturgy. Thus the Constitution on the Liturgy states both that “The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that a richer share of God’s word may be provided for the faithful” (art 51) and “In sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from holy Scriptures and it is to be more varied and apposite” (art 35.1).

Editions

The Lectionary for Mass – generally referred to here as the Roman Lectionary – represents the implementation of the principles set out by the Council. It was originally promulgated in 1969; a slightly revised second edition was issued in 1981.

Some other churches have adopted the basic format and approach of the Roman

Lectionary, though with modifications of their own. Of particular significance in this regard is the Revised Common Lectionary of 1992; this was prepared by the North American ecumenical-liturgical working group, the Consultation on Common Texts. Today this is used by several churches. Because the Roman Lectionary and Revised Common Lectionary are so similar (especially in the matters under consideration here), I refer to them collectively with the singular term, lectionary.

Content

The Roman Lectionary includes sets of biblical readings for Sundays, weekdays, feasts of saints, ritual and votive masses, and masses for various occasions. The Revised Common Lectionary includes readings for Sundays and festivals (or solemnities) only. Individual churches vary in their provision of readings for weekdays, saints' days and other occasions.

Here we are interested in the readings for Sundays and solemnities (festivals), for which three annual cycles have been provided; these are designated Year A, Year B, and Year C. The lectionary follows the liturgical year and calendar, hence there are two categories of Sundays. One is for the seasons of Advent, Christmastide, Lent and Eastertide; and the other for what Roman Catholics refer to as Ordinary Time (called Sundays after Epiphany / Pentecost by others).

The lectionary provides three biblical readings for each Sunday and solemnity. The first generally is taken from the Hebrew Scriptures; during Eastertide, however, it is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. The second reading comes from the Christian letters and book of Revelation and is sometimes referred to as the epistle, or apostolic reading, or "apostle." The third reading comes from the gospels.

(Here I use the term "Hebrew Scriptures" rather than the traditional "Old Testament," understanding that the former term has its limitations too.)

Related Documents

Official or authoritative documents that accompany, describe and interpret the lectionary and its contents are also important and are considered here. These include the General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar, Introduction to the Lectionary (both Roman Catholic texts), and the Introduction of the Revised Common Lectionary.

Foundational Principles

The construction of a lectionary involves several principles that often are left unstated or that remain obscure. I refer to these as choice, limited opportunity, and pastoral benefit. They deserve to be named right at the beginning of this study.

Choice

Even though much more scripture is used in Sunday worship today than formerly was the case, no attempt is made to read the whole of any book or part of the Bible. Instead, *particular passages are chosen for use*; the principle of choice is important for the present project. Except for certain central festivals, for example Christmas and Easter, there is rarely any compulsion to use this or that individual reading. Instead, one *chooses* particular readings. Such choices are not random or arbitrary, however, but are guided by various criteria – which may vary from one lectionary project to another. Hopefully these criteria and the choices that follow are stated and open to critical review -- but this is not always the case.

Limited Opportunity

It often happens that several biblical passages are suitable for lectionary use on a particular Sunday or other occasion. In any one liturgical celebration, however, only one is to be used. A perfectly appropriate passage may therefore have to be left out.

Pastoral Benefit

The Introduction to the Lectionary states clearly that “the Lectionary... has been composed above all for a pastoral purpose” (n 58), and “the first consideration [in the choice of readings] must be the best interests of those taking part [in the liturgy]” (n 81). It refers several times to “pastoral advantage” (n 52), “pastoral reasons” (nn 76, 79), “a pastoral aim” (n 78), and “a pastoral criterion” (n 80). Pastoral benefit is an important aim and criterion to keep in mind, but how this is understood, and who makes such decisions, remain open questions.

Biblical Passages Not Included in the Lectionary

The use of a lectionary brings up two further points, which, however, cannot be treated in detail here.

The application of the principles just named inevitably mean that some biblical passages are excluded from the lectionary used for Sunday worship. This does not mean that they are excluded from all liturgical use, however. If the Sunday lectionary includes ca 180 biblical readings, the Roman Catholic lectionary for weekday eucharistic celebrations offers another ca 800 biblical passages. Scripture readings are also part of the liturgy of the hours (daily offices), including the Office of Readings. Private devotional reading and various opportunities for bible study provide other opportunities for reading scripture.

Difficult Readings

Some biblical passages are considered to be “difficult readings” – they raise hard questions for readers today. Such biblical texts deserve contextualization, interpretation, and intelligent and spiritual application, and such explanation may be extremely helpful to modern readers. Some may say that this work should be done during Sunday worship; others may think

that Sunday worship is precisely the wrong time and place to do this. What other opportunities are there for this such teaching? At what other time are so many people gathered? But is there enough time during Sunday worship for such interpretation and explanation, and are parish pastors adequately equipped for this work? Is such teaching compatible with what is expected of the liturgical homily? This matter needs public discussion by scholars, pastors and laity.

AIMS AND APPROACHES

Here I state the goals of this project and the process that was following in attempting to achieve these objectives.

Objectives

There are four primary objectives, as follows.

1. To name and appreciate the variety of “issues” having to do with the present liturgical lectionary (for the liturgical seasons only).
2. To develop criteria that can be applied to individual liturgical readings and groups of readings in order to identify passages that are problematic with respect to these issues.
3. To suggest responses that would eliminate the issues or minimize their impact.
4. To offer for study and discussion alternative orders of lectionary readings for Good Friday and the seasons of Lent, Eastertide and Advent.

Three goals of a different type may also be stated:

5. To show that alternative readings (from both Christian Scriptures and Hebrew Scriptures) can be identified that are appropriate as liturgical readings for individual Sundays of the liturgical seasons.

6. To show that it is possible to construct a lectionary that has fewer shortcomings than the present one.

7. To allay fears associated with possible change. Thus one potential obstacle to considering an alternative lectionary for the liturgical seasons is imagination. One may not be able to imagine such a thing at all, or one’s imagination may conjure up something that is quite frightening. The present project demonstrates in a concrete and detailed way what such an alternative lectionary might actually look like. Studying it may calm the apprehensions of some – but may confirm the worst fears of others. In either case they will be reacting to something concrete rather than imaginary.

Process

A variety of courses of action are possible with respect to addressing issues in the lectionary. Some I adopt and others I do not. In general these may be divided into (a) those that would *not* involve changing the text of a reading, and (b) those that would involve such changes.

One course of action would be to say that there are no “issues” and therefore no need to do anything. Obviously I do not agree with this position. Another would be to rely on explanations, biblical and theological education, and on preaching. I accept that education and preaching are important. However, I am not at all sure that present efforts in these regards are as effective as might be desired. Furthermore, I do not accept that they are sufficient to deal with the issues at hand.

Changing the text might involve, in the first place, better translation – for example “sisters and brothers” in place of “brothers”, and “religious authorities” in place of “the Jews”. I accept the importance of this approach and assume that this will be done. However I do not deal with it directly and again, do not accept that this alone would be sufficient.

Changing the text might also involve selective shortening of texts, for example by omitting a verse or half-verse here and there. Alternatively, brief additions might be made, for example to include a woman’s story. Here I use selective shortening in a few cases, but it is not my principal method.

My main approach is to set aside readings that are problematic *in any way*, and to choose alternative readings to use in their place. As many of the present lectionary readings as possible continue to be used, though sometimes on different days.

To say “problematic in any way” here is to recognize that some biblical readings are problematic in part but also not problematic in part. The relative extent of the problematic content will of course vary from “a little” to “a lot.” For purposes of this study, I set aside even passages that are problematic only “a little”; this is simply a methodological simplification.

To say “set aside” can mean two things. One is to “omit” or “not use” a particular passage; this would seem appropriate for readings that are highly problematic. In other cases, however, setting aside might lead to the following course of action. The problematic reading of the present lectionary is set alongside the alternative reading(s) that I propose. The pros and cons – advantages and disadvantages – of each are then named, discussed and debated. This should lead to a decision: either keep the present lectionary reading (with or without amendment) or use the proposed alternative reading.

I often offer more than one alternative passage for a given day, even though only one of these is to be used in a particular liturgical celebration. In part this is simply to show the richness of the Bible. In part it is to encourage further discussion regarding which passage might be preferable on a particular liturgical occasion, and for what reasons. In part is because I feel some

choice in this matter might be a good thing, showing respect for individual congregations, pastoral ministers, and diverse pastoral needs. Unity need not require uniformity in this regard.

The approach taken here is more radical, more difficult, and for me, more satisfying than other possible courses of action. It is more radical because it involves more extensive changes in the lectionary than other approaches. It also goes more deeply and touches on more fundamental matters. It is obviously more difficult than making minor changes or no changes at all. It is satisfying in that I believe that I have produced a substantially better set of lectionary readings than other courses of action would lead to.

This project is of course an experiment, and needs evaluation; suggestions for improvement are expected. Finally, I am under no illusion that this is the only possible set of alternative readings; others might make different choices.

NAMING ISSUES AND ESTABLISHING CRITERIA

The matter of “issues” having to do with the lectionary will be considered in two parts. In this section I will consider the “big picture” and general principles having to do with each type of issue. In later sections these will be applied to the present readings for the liturgical seasons.

Respecting Jews and Judaism

Based on documents such as Vatican Council II’s *Nostra Aetate*, the U. S. Bishops’ “Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations” (1985 revision), related documents of other churches and groups, and a large body of scholarly studies, I have identified the following concerns that are relevant to this study. I name them as follows. All are complex and deserve more comment than can be given here.

Issues and the Christian Scriptures

- Blaming Jews for the death of Jesus
- Negativity toward the Pharisees
- Negativity toward Jewish worship
- Dwelling on the shortcomings of Israel
- Supersessionism
- Omission of positive views of Judaism

Issues and the Hebrew Scriptures

- Negativity toward Jewish worship
- Dwelling on the shortcomings of Israel
- Choice of readings on the basis of “salvation history” (in Lent)
- Choice of readings on the basis of “messianic prophecy” (in Advent)
- Choice of readings on the basis in “inappropriate appropriation” (in Lent and Good

Friday)
Failure to use the Hebrew Scriptures (in Eastertide)

These issues will be made clearer as examples are given later.

Below, individual lectionary readings will be examined to see if the above-named issues apply.

Harmony, Source of Faith, and the Use of the Hebrew Scriptures

In addition to these issues, however, there is a larger question that applies to the choice of readings from the Hebrew Scriptures in general. The Introduction to the Lectionary identifies the following principles in this regard.

The principles governing the Order of Readings for Sundays and the solemnities of the Lord are called the principles of “harmony” and of “semicontinuous reading.” One or the other applies according to the different seasons of the year and the distinctive character of the particular liturgical seasons. (66.3)

The best instance of harmony between the Old and New Testament readings occurs when it is one that Scripture itself suggests. This is the case when the teaching and events recounted in texts of the New Testament bear a more or less explicit relationship to the teaching and events of the Old Testament. *The present Order of Readings selects Old Testament texts mainly because of their correlation with New Testament texts read in the same Mass, and particularly with the gospel text.* (67a) (emphasis added)

Harmony of another kind exists between texts of the readings for each Mass during Advent, Lent, and Easter, the seasons that have a distinctive importance or character. (67b)

In contrast, the Sundays in Ordinary Time do not have a distinctive character. Thus the texts of both the apostolic and gospel readings are arranged in an order of semicontinuous reading, whereas the Old Testament reading is harmonized with the gospel. (67c)

To this may be added the following statement from the Introduction of the Revised Common Lectionary:

From the First Sunday of Advent to Trinity Sunday of each year, the Old Testament reading is closely related to the gospel reading for the day. (11)

Comments:

1. I suggest that the term “harmony” was introduced to avoid using the word “typology.”

The two terms may or may not be entirely equivalent.

2. These paragraphs are not completely consistent with each other. Thus 66.3 seems to indicate that “harmony” does not apply to Ordinary Time, but 67c says that during Ordinary Time “the Old Testament reading is harmonized with the gospel.”

3. The main statement with respect to the liturgical seasons is 67b. I understand this to say that during the seasons all the readings are harmonized with respect to the *season*. It does not say that one reading should be harmonized with another reading. I find this to be a reasonable approach.

4. However, the provision of 67a overlaps with both 67b and 67c: it may or may not apply, depending on the texts in question.

5. Even during the liturgical seasons, different relationships can exist. In the present work, I found it helpful – and I think reasonable – to consider the gospels for the Sundays of Lent to be especially important for thinking about the other readings – without engaging in any kind of typological exercise. However, this was not the case at all for the Sundays of Eastertide: here the three sets of readings were relatively independent of each other – but all were related to the season. For the present readings of the Sundays of Advent, in contrast, I think a case can be made that the readings from the Hebrew Scriptures are primary and that gospel readings are chosen to “harmonize” with them.

6. In any case, I think that thinking about relationships can be simplified, and thinking about harmony transcended, by attending to the following excerpt from the U.S. Bishops’ Guidelines:

Scholarly studies and educational efforts should be undertaken to show the common historical, biblical, doctrinal and liturgical heritage shared by Catholics and Jews, as well as their differences. This includes not only *appreciation of the Hebrew Scriptures as a source of faith with their own perpetual value*, but also a recognition of Judaism as a living tradition that has a strong and creative religious life through the centuries since the birth of Christianity from the common root. (n 10a) (emphasis added)

What is primary here is that the Hebrew Scriptures are considered as independent of the Christian Scriptures – except that all are “source of faith”. All three readings for a particular Sunday have to make sense for Christian worshippers in a particular liturgical season, but acrobatics do not have to be done to relate them or to find passages in one part of the Bible that fit or relate to other readings. All relate to each other and to the requirements of the season as “source of faith with their own perpetual value.” **This has been my approach in the present project.**

Revisioning Church

Scripture readings chosen for Sunday worship necessarily reveal something of the communities that use them -- they say something about the self-understanding of the church. Several issues arise in this regard.

1. Respect for Jews and Judaism is not just an “interfaith” issue but also an ecclesial issue -- it is a characteristic of the church. What such respect means in the context of the lectionary has already been considered.

2. Failure to include readings that show women as full members and participants in the church constitutes an “issue.” Adequate attention should be paid to the presence and role of women in Israel, in the life and ministry of Jesus, and in the early church. Violence against women should be condemned.

3. Failure to select appropriate readings from the Acts of the Apostles constitutes an issue. Readings should show a church that includes (in addition to women and men):

leaders, preachers and the faithful

Jew and Greek

slave and free

and that stretches from Jerusalem to Rome to the ends of the earth.

Readings from this source should also show that debate, disagreement, and communal decision making are part of church life.

4. Failure to select readings that show that the life of the church is characterized by covenantal / baptismal living also constitutes an issue. This is considered at length in the sections on Lent and Eastertide below.

Refocusing Liturgical Seasons

Good Friday and the seasons of Lent, Eastertide and Advent are described, defined and interpreted not only by the readings of the lectionary itself, but also in related authoritative documents (as already stated above). Some of these statements are better than others. To the extent that they fall short and are inadequate or inconsistent, they constitute issues. Here I point out some of these shortcomings.

Lent

According to the General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar,

Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter. For the Lenten liturgy disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens, through the several stages of Christian initiation; the faithful, through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices. (27)

I fully accept this. However, the relevant documents go on to say that this actually applies only to

the readings of Year A, not those of Year B or Year C. In fact, they apply only to Sundays 1-5 of Year A, not Ash Wednesday or Passion Sunday. I feel that the failure to apply the basic definition given above to all of Lent, in a consistent manner, is a serious issue.

In addition, the failure to make Passion Sunday (Lent 6) part of the lenten preparation for Easter rather than an anticipation of Good Friday, constitutes an issue.

Good Friday

Good Friday is neither a liturgical season by itself, of course, nor is it by itself the climax and conclusion of Lent. Rather it is considered to be one part of the paschal triduum, the great three days of Easter. I fully accept this. It may be asked, however, if the scripture readings adequately communicate this view. Because the main concern in this liturgy is respect for Jews and Judaism, I do not spend any time on this point.

Easter tide

“Easter” corresponds with three distinct time periods. It is Easter day or Easter Sunday, beginning with the Easter Vigil and concluding with Vespers on Sunday afternoon or evening. It is the great Three Days, beginning Holy Thursday afternoon / evening and continuing through Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, in which the entire paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection is celebrated. It is, finally, the Easter Season or Eastertide, extending over a fifty day period concluding with Pentecost.

The General Norms really say little about the character of Eastertide, except that it constitutes a unity and is to be celebrated joyfully. At one level, these fifty days owe their Easter character to the fact that Ascension and Pentecost are celebrated on the biblical fortieth and fiftieth days after Easter. Because of the close relationship of these festivals to Easter, the entire period is viewed as a unity. From the point of view of the lectionary, however, further questions have to be asked. The following issues can be identified:

1. Lack of unity. The gospels for the first three Sundays continue to tell stories of Easter and the immediate post-Easter period. From the fourth Sunday on, however, the gospel readings, while fine in themselves, have no particular connection with the Easter story. What connects these two parts of the Easter season? What unity is there in this?

2. Failure to be paschal. The Acts of the Apostles provides first readings during Eastertide. One rationale for this practice is that the biblical stories of Ascension and Pentecost are told by this source. This is fine, of course, but does the rest of Acts have any particular connection to Easter? What passages from Acts are used, and how, if at all, do they convey an Easter message?

3. Omission of the Hebrew Scriptures. As indicated above, another characteristic of the lectionary during Eastertide is that the Hebrew Scriptures are not used. Is this supposed to be a paschal message of some kind, or just a practical matter -- making space for the readings from

Acts?

4. Baptism is not mentioned in these documents either in relation to the paschal triduum, Easter Sunday, or Eastertide. Though baptism at Easter is a stated goal of Lent, why is the celebration and living out of baptism not a stated characteristic of the Easter season?

Advent

The General Norms make the following statement regarding Advent:

Advent has a twofold character, as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered: as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation. (29)

The two perspectives named here are expanded to three in the description given in the Introduction of the Lectionary:

Advent. Sundays. Each gospel reading has a distinctive theme: the Lord's coming at the end of time (First Sunday of Advent), John the Baptist (Second and Third Sundays), and the events that prepared immediately for the Lord's birth (Fourth Sunday). (93)

Several issues arise with respect to these descriptions and definitions of Advent.

1. The exact scope of Advent is not adequately named. Different documents name these differently, and fail to include two additional perspectives that have been important historically (see below).

2. Advent is not as accessible as it ought to be. It is brief; it includes several distinct perspectives; the different readings for a given Sunday may consider distinct aspects of the season.

3. Time and temporality (past, present, future) are central to the meaning of Advent, but are not integrated or kept in balance -- nor is there agreement as to their relative significance.

4. Official definitions and descriptions fail to state or demonstrate the unity of Advent. In fact, they do not even agree that there is any unity in this liturgical season.

The Next Step: In the sections that follow, Good Friday and each liturgical season will be considered in turn and the principles considered above will be applied to individual liturgical readings and groups of readings. Readings that are problematic with respect to any issue will be identified. I then state how I have responded to each issue and problematic reading. Finally I offer alternative readings.

Related Publications by the Author

Remembering the Women: Women's Stories from Scripture for Sundays and Festivals.
Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 1999

A Prayer Book for Remembering the Women: Four Seven-Day Cycles of Prayer.
Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 2001

The following have been posted on my website: www.compumart.ab.ca/fhenders

Critical Reflections on the Passion Narrative of the Good Friday Liturgy

Critical Reflections on the Reproaches of the Good Friday Liturgy

Critical Reflections on the Good Friday Liturgy: Anti-Judaism, Paschal Character,
Relationship to Passion Sunday, Soteriology, Christology, the Preeminence of
John

Re-visioning the Good Friday Liturgy

Veneration of the Cross (Good Friday): Alternative Models

Re-visioning the Lectionary Readings for Ash Wednesday and the Sundays of Lent

Re-visioning the Lectionary for the Sundays of the Easter Season and for the Ascension

Re-visioning the Lectionary Readings for the Sundays of Advent

Unpublished and unposted

Re-visioning the Lectionary Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures for Lent, Good Friday
and the Easter Season

Baptismal Living and Lectionary Readings for Lent and the Easter Season

LENT: ISSUES AND RESPONSES

The principles considered above are here applied to the lectionary readings for the season of Lent. I also state my responses to each issue and problematic reading.

Respecting Jews and Judaism

The following is a list of issues, problematic readings, and proposed responses.

Christian Scriptures

Blaming Jews for the death of Jesus

Lent 6ABC = Passion Sunday (Synoptic passion narratives)

Response: Transfer these readings to Good Friday and shorten.

Negativity toward the Pharisees

Lent 4A gospel (John 9:1-41)

(Dispute with Pharisees -- man born blind)

Response: set this reading aside

Lent 5C gospel (John 8:1-11)

(Dispute with Pharisees -- woman caught in adultery)

Response: set this reading aside.

Negativity toward Jewish worship

Ash Wednesday ABC gospel (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18)

(Hypocrites in the synagogues)

Response: set this reading aside.

Lent 3B gospel (John 2:12-25)

(Jesus in the Temple; stop making my Father's house a marketplace)

Response: set this reading aside.

Dwelling on the shortcomings of Israel

Lent 3B epistle (1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-26)

(Jews demand signs / a stumbling block to Jews)

Response: set this reading aside.

Lent 3C epistle (1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12)

(God was not pleased with most of our ancestors)

Response: set this reading aside

Failure to select passages favorable to Jews and Judaism

Two passages are read on Sundays of Ordinary Time (18A, 19C), but not during Lent.

Response: select three such passages for the fifth Sunday in Lent.

Hebrew Scriptures

Dwelling on the shortcomings of Israel

Lent 4B Hebrew Scriptures (2 Chronicles 36:14-17a, 19-23)

(All the leading priests and the people were exceedingly unfaithful)

Response: set this reading aside

Reading chosen on the basis of inappropriate appropriation

Lent 6ABC = Passion Sunday Hebrew Scriptures (Isaiah 50:4-7)
(Suffering servant)

Response: set this reading aside [see comments below]

Readings chosen on the basis of salvation history

Lent 1-5 ABC Hebrew Scriptures (all readings)

Response: set these aside or use them in a different way; use instead the principle of source of faith with their own perpetual value.
[see comments below]

Comments:

Inappropriate appropriation: I use this term to refer to the way that some Christians and Churches use the Suffering Servant passages from Isaiah that is, as if there were no Jewish origins, context or interpretation. For all intents and purposes, for these Christians they have been completely christianized.

Salvation history: The Introduction to the Lectionary states the following principle:

The Old Testament readings are about the history of salvation, which is one of the themes proper to the catechesis of Lent. The series of texts for each year presents the main elements of salvation history from its beginning until the promise of the New Covenant.
(97)

This principle shows a high regard for the Hebrew Scriptures, uses them in a way that is independent of individual gospel passages, and says that they are important for the education and formation of those preparing for baptism and for those preparing to renew their baptism at Easter.

However, “salvation history” can be understood in more than one way. This concept can be understood as implying (a) that the Hebrew Scriptures are valued because they represent preparation for Jesus Christ and Christianity, or (b) that they are of value only inasmuch they are such preparation. The latter meaning would seem to be inconsistent – or not fully respectful – of the Hebrew Scriptures as “source of faith with their own perpetual value.” In addition, salvation history is only one approach to the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, though it was a prominent view at the time the Lectionary was being prepared.

Revisioning Church

Respect for Jews and Judaism

This point has been studied above. I feel that it is important to keep repeating that this is an ecclesial concern as well as an interfaith issue.

Inclusion of Women

The present lectionary readings for Lent include only a limited number of stories of women.

Response: Select additional passages that show women in Israel, in the life of Jesus, and in the life of the early Church. Passages that tell of violence against women are included in order to condemn such behavior and attitudes. Women's stories are especially prominent on the third Sunday of Lent.

Refocusing Liturgical Seasons

Baptismal Living

I accept and endorse the principle, stated above, that Lent is a period of preparation for the celebration of Easter. This implies and includes preparation for baptism (Christian initiation). The liturgical readings must serve this end. While the lectionary applies this principle well for Sundays 1-5 of Year A, it is not applied well or consistently to Sundays 1-5 of Year B and Year C, or to Ash Wednesday, or to Lent 6ABC = Passion Sunday.

Response: The following is one attempt to apply this basic principle to all of Lent. I begin by considering the terms "Easter," "baptism" and "preparation."

"Easter" refers to the annual three-day celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the paschal mystery. This includes Good Friday and Easter Sunday in a unified experience and mystery. In addition, Easter is understood to extend to the living out of the paschal mystery in the daily lives of Christians.

"Baptism" refers to Christian initiation as it is celebrated in the Easter liturgy, generally (at least for some Christians) the three sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist in a single celebration. In addition, baptism includes the living out of Christian initiation: the trinitarian life into which persons are initiated, and the daily living of that life.

A consideration of "preparation" notes first that the Lenten readings are addressed to two audiences: catechumens, and the baptized. Catechumens are those who are in the last stages of their preparation for baptism. The baptized help the catechumens move toward baptism, in addition, they themselves are preparing to renew the baptismal covenant at Easter. The baptized accompany, encourage and pray for the catechumens; furthermore, they demonstrate the meaning and consequences of baptism by the example of their daily living.

Readings for the Lenten liturgies should express the meaning of Lenten preparation for Easter and for baptism and guide and support this experience for catechumens and the baptized alike. I unify all this here under the umbrella term, "baptismal living," and consider several of its characteristics. Baptismal living, furthermore, does not simply pertain to the lives of individuals, but also with the lives of local Christian communities and the life of the church in all its manifestations.

Baptismal living reflects a renewed relationship with God, with self, with other persons, and with the rest of creation. To live baptismally means at least the following:

1. To experience and acknowledge the fragility of the human condition, including temptation and sin.
2. To experience and acknowledge the possibility and potential of the human condition, including knowing God, living in fidelity, being fully alive, experiencing wholeness.
3. To live lives in which prayer, blessing, word and wisdom are central.
4. To live in a covenantal relationship with God, in continuity with the covenants of the past and mindful of the continuing and eternal dimension of covenant.
5. To know and follow Jesus Christ; to live in Christ, through the Spirit.
6. To live in a respectful relationship with the rest of creation.
7. To live in loving relationships with other persons, especially those in need; this includes doing justice, sharing with others, showing compassion, taking care of others, being life-giving persons.
8. To experience and support life in and by an inclusive community.
9. To experience and promote respect for Jews and Judaism.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday poses a particular challenge, both with respect to its lectionary readings and also with respect to the symbol of ashes.

Response: One possible response to these challenges is simply to omit Ash Wednesday (and the three weekdays that follow); historically, these days were relatively late additions to the six weeks of Lent that previously had begun with the first Sunday of Lent. However, because Ash Wednesday is so popular today, and because it also presents certain opportunities, it has been retained for the present project.

Ash Wednesday is complex. As the first day of Lent, it appropriately defines the character and spirit of Lent (at least in part). It also constitutes an invitation to enter into this liturgical season, and as well, it is the initial response to this invitation. Lectionary readings need to indicate that Lent is a preparation for Easter and for baptism, and that it is a period of baptismal reminder.

The readings should be positive in tone, not negative; should express affirmation and not

penitence in the sense of self-abnegation. They should hold out a vision, not scold or nag. They should be inviting – and show a Jesus and a God who are inviting – and not distancing or burdensome.

Alternative Readings A are oriented toward baptismal preparation as just described. Alternative Readings B are similar in tone to the present readings, but do not dwell on the shortcomings of Israel.

Ashes (which are not mentioned in the readings themselves), are viewed here as a symbol of honesty about oneself and one's society and world; accepting ashes is an acceptance of the human condition – including human mortality (“You are dust and unto dust you shall return.”). In addition, they are considered to be a symbol of the relationship of humankind with the rest of creation. They therefore have no negative connotation, nor are they associated with penitence in the sense of self-abnegation.

Passion (Palm) Sunday = Lent 6

In the present lectionary, the synoptic passion narratives are read on this day, as is a Suffering Servant passage and the “became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” passage from Philippians 2. It really becomes another Good Friday, but one celebrated six days early. I consider this to be inappropriate and here suggest an alternative approach.

Response -- Third Reading (Gospel): I set aside the bulk of the synoptic passion narratives. They are not abandoned entirely, however. The story of the woman who anointed Jesus at the beginning of the Matthean and Markan passion narratives are still used. The corresponding story from John's gospel is used as well. (The Lukan version has a different context and message, and is not appropriate here.)

The anointing of Jesus by the woman – in Matthew, Mark and John – is an anticipation of Jesus' death and proleptic preparation for his burial. These readings therefore look forward to Jesus' death, but do not tell the entire story of his last days. The anointing on the head in Matthew and Mark is an anointing for Jesus' ministry of priest, prophet and shepherd. This action is therefore a statement of who it is who is moving toward his death, and a statement regarding the meaning of his paschal mystery.

The action of the woman who anoints Jesus speaks of her great affection and regard for Jesus, and at least in the case of Mary of Bethany, of her personal, close friendship with him. It is also an act of courage and boldness as well as of care and concern. Finally, it is an action of a minister of the gospel, in anticipation of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The story of the woman who anoints Jesus also connects with the rest of Lent and its readings. Thus the invitation to know Jesus that was issued on Ash Wednesday has resulted in close friendship and loving regard for Jesus. This woman exemplifies the courage and boldness that results from hearing, accepting and responding to the good news – told both in the Hebrew

Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures. In this action, as well as in Jesus' own person, the reign of God is seen to be near. This anointing also is an example of compassion for one in need and of care for the poor and marginalized – he who will soon be condemned to die.

The anointing story also provides an example of the ministry of women and the kind of relationship that Jesus had with women. It also recognizes that these are Jewish women, performing Jewish ritual actions.

Response -- Hebrew Scriptures: The Suffering Servant Passage is set aside. Instead, stories of Moses are offered in its place. This is not done with any “typological” intent, however, trying to see Jesus in Moses. Rather, the intent is to see Moses in Jesus; the stories of Moses tell us something about Jesus. Jesus is viewed in continuity with Moses, not in contrast.

These stories, therefore, are not focused on the suffering and death of Jesus, but on intercession, prayer, prophetic ministry, leadership, closeness to God – all experiences and qualities of Moses and likewise of Jesus. They also pertain to the life of the baptized.

Response – Second Reading. The wonderful reading from Philippians 2 is transferred to Good Friday. Instead I suggest three readings from the book of Revelation that speak about the Lamb. The Lamb here is both slain and risen, and these passages therefore point to the entire paschal mystery. The emphasis, however, is not so much on the death of the Lamb but on the life-giving character and continuing ministry of the risen and triumphant Lamb.

Three-year Cycle

The present lectionary at times deviates from the principle of having three distinct cycles of readings (for example, Ash Wednesday, Lent 1, Lent 2, Lent 6)

Response: I have supplied additional readings -- or a wider selection -- for the days in question.

LENT: ALTERNATIVE ORDER OF READINGS

ASH WEDNESDAY

Alternative Readings A

First Reading

Present Readings

ABC Rend your hearts (RL Joel 2:12-18; RCL [alt] 1:1-2, 12-17)

Loose the bonds of injustice (RCL [alt] Isaiah 58:1-12)

Proposed Readings

Be the people God calls us to be

- Year A Humankind is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26 - 2:3)
God does a new thing (Isaiah 43:15-21)
Year B Loose the bonds of injustice (Isaiah 58:6-12)
That I may know what is pleasing to God (Wisdom 9:9-18)
Year C A holy people (Deuteronomy 7:6-11)
God's own people (Isaiah 43:1-7)

Second Reading

Present Reading

ABC Be reconciled to God (RL 2 Corinthians 5:20- 6:2; RCL 5:20b -6:10)

Proposed Readings

Invited to a close relationship with Jesus Christ

- Year A Called into fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:4-9)
Year B Enlightened hearts (Ephesians 1:15-20)
Year C Blessed and chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Present Reading

ABC Your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you (RL Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18; RCL 6:1-6, 16-21)

Proposed Readings

Jesus brings us God's good news

- Year A The beatitudes (Matthew 4:23 - 5:1)
Year B Jesus cured many and proclaimed the good news (Mark 1:29-39)
Year C To bring good news (Luke 4:14-21)

Alternative Readings B

First Reading (Hebrew Scriptures)

- Year A You shall take delight in the Lord (Isaiah 58:9-14)
Year B Nineveh was converted from its evil ways (Jonah 3:1-10)
Year C You will be God's people (Deuteronomy 26:16-19)

Second Reading (Gospel)

Year A Judge your neighbor justly (Matthew 25:31-46)

Year B This is how you are to pray (Matthew 6:7-15)

Year B They who ask, always receive (Matthew 7:7-12)

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

First Reading

Present Readings

A The creation and the sin of our first parents (RL Genesis 2:2-7, 16-18, 25; 3:1-7;
RCL 2:15-17; 3:1-7)

B Covenant with Noah (RL Genesis 9:8-15; RCL 9:8-17)

C Profession of faith (RL Deuteronomy 26:4-16; RCL 26:1-11)

Proposed Readings

The fragility of the human condition

Year A The man and woman in the garden (Genesis 2:15-27; 3:1-7)

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-10)

The tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)

Year B Grumbling in the desert (Exodus 6:1-3; Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 21:4-9)

The golden calf (Exodus 32:1-10)

Fear and rebellion (Deuteronomy 1:19-22, 41-45)

Year C Rape of Dinah (Genesis 34:1-7, 25b-31)

David lusts after Bathsheba and plots the death of her husband (2 Samuel 11:2-26)

Rape and murder of the Levite's wife (Judges 19:22b-30)

Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22)

Ahab and Jezebel plot against Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-16)

Second Reading

Present Readings

A Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (RL, RCL Romans 5:12-19)

B The waters of the flood prefigure baptism (RL, RCL 1 Peter 3:18-22)

C This is how believers in Christ profess their faith (RL Romans 10:8-13; RCL 10:8b-13)

Proposed Readings

Sin, grace and salvation

Year A The grace of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:12-19)

Year B Christ was made alive in the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18-22)
Year C Confess that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:8-13)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Present Readings

Year A Temptation of Jesus (RL, RCL Matthew 4:1-11)
Year B Temptation of Jesus (RL Mark 1:12-15; RCL Mark 1:9-13)
Year C Temptation of Jesus (RL, RCL Luke 4:1-11)

Proposed Readings

The fragility of the human condition

Year A Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-15; Luke 4:1-13)
Year B Judas betrays Jesus (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:1-11)
Execution of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-10; Mark 6:17-29)
Year C Peter denies Jesus (Matthew 26:69-73; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18)
Greatness in God's Reign (Matthew 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45)
Who is the greatest? (Luke 22:24-27)

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

First Reading

Present Readings

A The calling of Abraham RL (Genesis 12:1-4; RCL 12:1-4a)
B Abraham and Isaac (RL Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-19; RCL 17:1-2, 17-18)
C Covenant with Abraham (RL Genesis 15:5-12; RCL 15:1-2, 17-18)

Proposed Readings

The possibilities and potential to which God calls humankind.

Year A The three angels visit Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1-5)
Know that I am with you (Genesis 28:10-17)
Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6, 13-15)
Elijah encounters God (1 Kings 19:9b-13)
Year B The women defy Pharaoh and save Moses (Exodus 1:15 - 2:10)
Rahab saves the scouts (Joshua 2:1-12)
A widow feeds the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:8-16)
The three youth refuse to worship false gods (Daniel 3:13-28)
Daniel is faithful to the one true God (Daniel 6:10-13, 16-23)
Year C Dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14)
Entrance into the promised land and first passover (Joshua 4:19-24 + 5:10-12)
Elijah raises the widow's son to life (1 Kings 17:17-24)

Elisha restores the woman's son to life (2 Kings 4:18-27)

Second Reading

Present Readings

- A God called us to be bold and gives us life (RL 2 Timothy 1:8b-10)
Abraham believed God (RCL Romans 4:1-5, 13-17)
- B God did not withhold his only Son (RL Romans 8:31b-35, 37)
Abraham's faith (RCL Romans 4:13-25)
- C Christ will transform our humble bodies (RL, RCL Philippians 2:17 - 4:1)

Proposed Readings

The possibilities and potential to which God calls humankind.

Year A Christ Jesus abolished death (2 Timothy 1:8b-10)

Year B Who will separate us from the love of God? (Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39)

Year C You will have life through God's Spirit (Romans 8:6-11)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Present Readings

- A Transfiguration (RL, RCL [alt] Matthew 17:1-9)
Unless one is born of water and the Spirit (RCL [alt] John 3:1-17)
- B Transfiguration (RL Mark 9:2-10; RCL [alt] 9:2-9)
Whoever would save his life will lose it: Prediction of the passion (RCL [alt] Mark 8:31-38)
- C Transfiguration (RL Luke 9:28b-36; RCL [alt] 9:28-36)
Herod seeks Jesus' death: Prediction of the passion (RCL [alt] Luke 13:31-35)

Proposed Readings

The possibilities and potential to which God calls humankind

Year A Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28b-30)

Year B Born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-10)

Everyone who believes shall have eternal life (John 3:14-17)

OR John 3:1-17)

Become like children (Matthew 18:1-5)

Let the children come to me (Matthew 19:13-15)

Receive the kingdom like a little child (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

Whoever welcomes this child (Luke 9:46-48)

Year C The ten lepers called to give praise and thanks (Luke 17:11-19)

How often should I forgive? (Matthew 18:15-22)

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

First Reading

Present Readings

- A Give us water to drink (RL Exodus 17:3-7; RCL 17:1-7)
- B Ten commandments / Sinai (RL, RCL Exodus 20:1-17)
- C Moses and the burning bush (RL Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15)
Come to the waters (RCL Isaiah 55:1-9)

Proposed Readings

Covenantal relationship with God

- Year A Covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:13-22; Genesis 9:8-17)
Covenant and blessing of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17:1-8, 15-24)
- Year B Covenant of Sinai (Exodus 19:1-6)
Covenant of Sinai: The Ten Words (Exodus 20:1-17)
Covenant of Sinai: Moses on the mountain (Exodus 24:1-18)
Covenant with David: choice and anointing of David (1 Samuel 16:1-13)
Covenant with David: David's throne will be established forever (2 Samuel 7:1-17 or 7:11b-17)
Covenant with David (2 Samuel 23:1-5)
- Year C God's continuing covenant (Jeremiah 31:1-14; Jeremiah 31:15-22)
A new heart and spirit (Ezekiel 35:23b-28)
Covenant of peace (Isaiah 54:9-14)
An everlasting covenant (Isaiah 55:1-13)

Second Reading

Present Readings

- A God's love has been poured into our hearts (RL Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; RCL 5:1-11)
- B We proclaim Christ crucified (RL 1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-25; RCL 1:18-25)
- C Our ancestors' experience in the desert under Moses (RL 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12; RCL 10:1-13)

Proposed Readings

The church, an inclusive community

- Year A No longer male and female (Galatians 3:25-28)
- Year B The faith of mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:1-7)
- Year C Female and male ministers of the gospel (Romans 16:1-16)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Present Readings

- A Samaritan woman (RL, RCL John 4:5-42)

- B Jesus in the Temple (RL John 2:13-25); RCL 2:13-22)
- C Unless you repent / Fig tree (RL, RCL Luke 13:1-9)

Proposed Readings

Jesus' ministry and relationship with women

- Year A The Samaritan woman (John 4:3-42)
- Year B The faith of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-29)
The faith of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 8:24-30)
- Year C The daughter of Jairus' family and the woman with the hemorrhage (Matthew 9:18-26;
Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-46)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

First Reading

Present Readings

- A David was anointed king (RL 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; RCL 16:1-3)
- B Infidelity / punishment / salvation / Cyrus (RL 2 Chronicles 35:14-17a, 19-23)
Moses made a serpent of bronze (RCL Numbers 21:4-9)
- C Entering the Promised Land (RL Joshua 5:9a, 10-12; RCL 5:9-12)

Proposed Readings

Creation, justice, sharing

- Year A Justice and sharing with those in need (Deuteronomy 24:10-15, 17-22)
Love your neighbor (Leviticus 19:9-10, 13-14, 18)
Sharing leftovers (Ruth 2:14-18)
- Year B God is bringing you into a good land (Deuteronomy 8:7-10)
The land shall observe a sabbath (Leviticus 25:1-7)
Wisdom, like a cedar in Lebanon (Sirach 24:1-2, 12-17)
- Year C The river of life (Ezekiel 47:7-12)
Let the earth bless God (Prayer of Azariah and Song 35-60 / Daniel 3:57-82)

Second Reading

Present Readings

- A Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you (RL, RCL Ephesians 5:8-14)
- B Even when we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive (RL Ephesians 2:4-10; RCL 2:1-10)
- C Through Christ, God has reconciled us to himself (RL 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; RCL 5:16-21)

Proposed Readings

Life in Christ

Year A Live as children of light (Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10, 18b-20)

Year B God raises us up with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-10)

Year C In Christ there is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Present Readings

A Man born blind (RL, RCL John 9:1-41)

B God so loved the world / Belief and condemnation (RL, RCL John 3:13-21)

C Prodigal son (RL Luke 15:1-3, 22-32; RCL 15:1-3, 11b-32)

Proposed Readings

Jesus' care and compassion for persons in need

Year A Carrying the paralytic to Jesus (Mark 2:1-5)

Year B The needs of our neighbor (Matthew 25:31-46)

Year C Compassion for the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

First Reading

Present Readings

A I will put my spirit within you (RL Ezekiel 37:12-14; RCL 37:1-14)

B New covenant (RL, RCL Jeremiah 31:31-34)

C I am about to do a new thing (RL, RCL Isaiah 43:16-21)

Proposed Readings

Prayer, wisdom, word and blessing

Year A Hannah, model of prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10)

Solomon, model of prayer (1 Kings 3:3-9)

Nehemiah, model of prayer (Nehemiah 1:5-11)

Judith, model of prayer (Judith 9:1-11)

Esther, model of prayer (Esther 14:3-13)

Year B Keep God's word (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Prize wisdom (Proverbs 4:5-13)

Wisdom is with God (Wisdom 9:9-18)

Wisdom was created first (Sirach 1:1-10)

Year C Rebekah is blessed (Genesis 24:53-61)
The blessing of Aaron (Numbers 6:22-27)
Israel is blessed (Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 8-14)
God is blessed for Abigail (1 Samuel 25:32-34)
Judith is blessed (Judith 13:18-20)

Second Reading

Present Readings

- A The Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead will give life (RL Romans 9:9-11; RCL 9:6-11)
- B Christ learned obedience and became the source of eternal salvation (RL Hebrews 5:7-9; RCL 5:5-10)
- C I have suffered the loss of all things (RL Philippians 3:8-14; RCL 4:4b-14)

Proposed Readings

Respect for Jews and Judaism

Year A To them belongs the covenant (Romans 9:1-5)
Year B God has not rejected God's people (Romans 11:1-6)
Year C By faith our ancestors received approval (Hebrews 11:1-3, 7-12)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Present Readings

- A Faith of Martha and Mary and raising of Lazarus (RL, RCL John 11:1-45)
- B The hour has come / The kind of death he was to die (RL, RCL John 12:20-33)
- C Jesus confronts the hypocrites (RL John 9:1-11)
Mary anoints Jesus (RCL John 12:1-8)

Proposed Readings

Jesus gives life and reconciles

Year A The faith of Martha and Mary and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45)
Year B Jesus eats and drinks with sinners (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32)
Year C The prodigal son and the loving father (Luke 15:11-32)
Jesus confronts the hypocrites (John 8:1-11)

PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY – SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Procession with Palms

Present Readings

- A Entrance into Jerusalem (RL, RCL Matthew 2:1-11)
- B Entrance into Jerusalem (RL Mark 11:1-10; RCL 11:1-11 or RL, RCL John 12:12-16)
- C Entrance into Jerusalem (RL, RCL Luke 19:28-40)

Proposed Readings

The same.

Eucharist

First Reading

Present Readings

Years ABC Servant Song (RL Isaiah 50:4-7; RCL 50:4-9a)

Proposed Readings

Moses and his ministry

Year A The people believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses (Exodus 14:21-22, 29, 31)

You should represent the people before God (Exodus 18:13-23)

God summoned Moses (Exodus 19:16-20)

Moses told the people / Covenant renewal liturgy (Exodus 24:1-8)

Moses intercedes with God for the people (Exodus 32:11-13)

Year B Moses prayed to the Lord (Numbers 11:1-3)

Would that all God's people were prophets (Numbers 11:26-29)

With Moses I speak face to face (Exodus 12:6-8a)

Moses intercedes for the people (Numbers 14:10b-19 or Numbers 14:1-19)

Year C Moses prayed for the people (Deuteronomy 9:18-29 or 9:25-29)

A prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18)

Death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-12)

Second Reading

Present Reading

ABC Jesus humbled himself (RL Philippians 2:6-11; RCL 2:5-11)

Proposed Readings

The life-giving Lamb

Year A Invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-10)

Year B Nations will walk by the light of the Lamb (Revelation 21:22-27)

Year C For the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-5)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Present Readings

- A Passion narrative (RL, RCL Matthew 26:14 - 27:66)
- B Passion narrative (RL, RCL Mark 14:1 - 15:47)
- C Passion narrative (RL, RCL Luke 2:14 - 23:56)

Proposed Readings

The anointing of Jesus by the women

Year A The woman anoints Jesus (Matthew 26:6-13)

Year B The woman anoints Jesus (Mark 14:3-9)

Year C Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus (John 12:1-8)

GOOD FRIDAY: ISSUES AND RESPONSES

Respecting Jews and Judaism

The following is a list of issues, problematic readings, and proposed responses.

Inappropriate appropriation

First reading: Hebrew Scriptures (Isaiah 52: 13 - 53:12)

Response: set this reading aside [see comments below]

Supersessionism

Second reading: Epistle (Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9)

Response: set this reading aside

Blaming Jews for the death of Jesus

Third reading: Gospel (John chapters 18 and 19 - the passion narrative)

Response: shorten this reading [see comments below]

Comments:

Inappropriate appropriation: As above, I use this term to refer to the way that some Christians and Churches use the Suffering Servant passages from Isaiah – as if there were no Jewish origins, context or interpretation. These passages therefore become completely christianized. I reject this type of usage.

A respectful way to view the Suffering Servant passages would be to first recognize that there was an original Suffering Servant – whether an individual or corporate remnant – who lived at the time of the exile in Babylon and had to do with Israel’s hope of restoration. It is then appropriate to appreciate that because God is consistent, divine grace could work in similar ways in the time of Judea’s exile under Rome, and hence in the life of Jesus.

Some Christians, however, see the Suffering Servant passages as clear predictions of Jesus. In this view the biblical author was inspired to see into the future. The passion fulfills the prophecy, and Christians need not worry about whatever meaning this passage might have had for the biblical author and in this author’s own time. This approach is communicated, for example, in the Introduction to the Lectionary:

On Good Friday the liturgical service has as its center John’s narrative of the passion of him who was portrayed as the Servant of Yahweh and also became the one High Priest by offering himself to the Father. (99)

I consider such an approach to be unacceptable.

Shortening: This is simply the application of the *principle of choice*, which as stated above, is a basic principle of lectionary construction. Omission of verses, for example, is used frequently in the Roman Lectionary, though less commonly in the Revised Common Lectionary. The Introduction of the Lectionary names and justifies this practice, for example, in the section on “Main criteria applied in choosing and arranging the readings”. The subsections on “length of texts” (n 75), “omission of verses” (n 77), and “long and short forms of texts” (n 80) are of particular relevance here. I simply apply this to the johannine passion narrative.

GOOD FRIDAY: ALTERNATIVE ORDER OF READINGS

First Reading

A. One approach to the selection of alternative texts for the first reading is as follows. Jesus, in his suffering, death and resurrection, stands in a long line of faithful Jews who have suffered but have

also been rescued or vindicated by God. This approach honors the Jewishness of Jesus, it also accepts the biblical texts first of all, as Israel's stories, which are also those of the Jewish Jesus.

This approach does not consider the first reading in a typological sense (though that mode of interpretation might be thrust upon it by some). It attempts rather to respect the character and integrity of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to see continuity (rather than discontinuity) between Jesus and his forebears. The following are examples of texts that might be used in this way.

Hagar and her son are sent into the desert, and God comes to their aid (Genesis 21:8-19)

Abraham and Isaac go to present a burnt offering, and God comes to their aid (Genesis 22:1-15)

Joseph is left to die, but is rescued (Genesis 37:2-35)

Jeremiah is imprisoned, but released (Jeremiah 37:1-22; 38:1-16 or portions thereof)

Susanna is unjustly accused and almost executed, but God comes to her aid (Daniel 13 / Susanna)

B. A second approach is to let the first reading interpret a message that is already implicit in the johannine passion narrative and that is developed more explicitly elsewhere in John's gospel. This is the theme of re-birth and becoming children of God. Jesus' death on the cross is seen as death in childbirth, giving birth to the church and to God's children in the Spirit. Appropriate first readings might include the following.

Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin. (Genesis 35:9-20)

The wife of Phineas dies in childbirth and the ark of God is captured. (1 Samuel 4:1-22)

These stories are respected for their own sake, but they also guide participants' interpretation of the passion narrative. Both approaches are also ways of bringing women's stories to the Good Friday liturgy.

Second Reading

A. One alternative is to follow the Revised Common Lectionary in using:

I will put my laws in their hearts (Hebrews 10:16-25)

B. A second alternative would be to use the passage at present used on Passion Sunday:

He became obedient to death (Philippians 2:6-11)

C. A third alternative, which would effectively express the paschal character of this liturgy, would be to use the same reading that is used at the Easter Vigil, namely:

Baptized in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-11)

D. A fourth alternative is to use other passages that explicitly link death and resurrection (and use diverse soteriological images as well). The following are possible readings.

Christ died, was raised, and makes intercession for us (Romans 8:18-39 [or 31-39])

Christ was raised from the dead. . . the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:3-28 [or 20-38])

[Christ] died and was raised . . . new creation / reconciliation / ambassadors / righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:14-21)

Christ was put to death, but was made alive in the Spirit (2 Peter 3:18-22) (This is now used for Lent 2B.)

Gospel

Five ways of shortening the johannine passion narrative are proposed.

A. Accusations of Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus are removed; this mainly concerns the account of the trial before Pilate (In 18:28- 19:16 some smoothing out may also need to be done where verses are omitted.) The liturgical reading would therefore have the following content:

Omitted:

18:14
18:29-32
18:35
18:38b-40
19:4-7
19:12
19:15

Included:

Arrest of Jesus (John 18:1-12)
Denial by Peter (John 18:15-20)
Appearance before Annas (John 18:19-24)
Trial before Pilate 18:28 + 18:33-34 + 18:36-38 +
19:1-3 + 19:8-11 + 19:13-14 + 19:16a
Denial by Peter (John 18:25-27)
Crucifixion and burial (John 19:16a-40)

B. The appearance before Annas and the trial before Pilate are omitted. The liturgical reading would have the following shape and content.

Omitted:

18:13-14
18:19-24
18:28-19:16a

Included:

Arrest of Jesus (John 18:1-12)
Denial by Peter (John 18:15-20; 18:25-27)
Crucifixion and burial (John 19:16b-40)

C. Here the prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 of John is added because it includes important statements regarding the meaning of his death and resurrection. In addition, the arrest of Jesus and denial by Peter are viewed as having been transferred to the first Sunday of Lent. Finally, as above, the appearance before Annas and the trial before Pilate are omitted. The liturgical reading would have the following shape and content

Omitted:

Transfer 18:1-12 to Lent 1B
Omit 18:13-14
Transfer 18:15-20 to Lent 1C
Omit 18:19-24
Transfer 18:25-27 to Lent 1C
Omit 18:28 -19:16a

Included:

Priestly prayer of Jesus (John 17:1-26 or portions)
Crucifixion and burial (John 19:16b-40)

D. Here the liturgical reading would include only the account of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, as follows.

Crucifixion and burial (John 19:16b-40 or 19:17-30)

E. Anglican and United Methodist resources suggest John 19:17-30 (crucifixion only) as a short version of the Good Friday gospel reading (Book of Alternative Services 1985, p 309; The New Handbook of the Christian Year, 1992, p 181).

Other. I also suggest that the synoptic passion narratives no longer be used on Passion Sunday. Instead, all four passion narratives would be proclaimed on Good Friday in a four-year cycle. The synoptic texts would also be shortened along the lines suggested here for the johannine text.

EASTERTIDE: ISSUES AND RESPONSES

The principles considered above are here applied to the lectionary readings for the season of Eastertide. I also state my responses to each issue and problematic reading.

Respecting Jews and Judaism

The following is a list of issues, problematic readings, and proposed responses.

Christian Scriptures

Blaming Jews for the death of Jesus

Several of the sermons of Peter and of Paul that are used in the present lectionary include accusations of Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. I give complete citations here only for the Roman Lectionary, though the same readings are also used in the Revised Common Lectionary.

Lent 3A (Acts 2:14, 22b-28)

...this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law (Acts 2:23)

Response: set this reading aside

Lent 3B (Acts 3:13b-15, 17-19)

...and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. (Acts 3:15)

Response: set this reading aside

Lent 3B (Acts 3:13b-15, 17-19)

...I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.... (Acts 3:17-19)

Response: set this reading aside

Lent 4B (Acts 4:7-12)

...let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead (Acts 4:10)

Response: set this reading aside

Lent 3C (5:27b-32, 40b-41)

The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree (Acts 5:30)

Response: set this reading aside

Lent 1ABC (Acts 10:34a, 36-43)

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree (Acts 10:39b)

Response: shorten by omitting verse 39b

The readings set aside are also problematic because they are not appropriate under the criterion of “baptismal living,” considered below.

Hebrew Scriptures

Failure to include readings from the Hebrew Scriptures

At present, no readings from the Hebrew Scriptures are included in the lectionary for the Easter season. From one perspective the omission of readings from the Hebrew Scriptures might be considered simply “practical”; it provides a relatively smooth way to fit in the Acts of the Apostles., 1 Peter and 1 John and the book of Revelation. However, the impression might be given (a) that it is not appropriate to use the Hebrew Scriptures during the Easter season, and/or (b) that appropriate readings from the Hebrew Scriptures do not occur or cannot be found, and/or (c) this is a supersessionist message, namely that with the resurrection the Christian church and its scriptures have replaced Israel and the Hebrew Scriptures.

Response: I reject any implication that the use of the Hebrew Scriptures is inappropriate, and have tried to identify a full set of such readings for all the Sundays and solemnities of the Easter season. The principle of source of faith with their own perpetual value has been followed. See more below, under Seasons.

Revisioning Church

Respect for Jews and Judaism

This point has been studied above, but is named here as well.

Inclusion of Women

The present lectionary readings for Eastertide include only a limited number of stories of women. More are included in the Revised Common Lectionary than in the Roman Lectionary.

Response: Additional passages that show women in Israel and in the life of the early Church have been selected.

Acts of the Apostles

The Introduction to the Lectionary states:

The first reading is from Acts, in a three-year cycle of parallel and progressive selections: material is presented on the life of the primitive Church, its witness, and its growth. (100b)

Several issues arise in this regard.

1. The present readings from the Acts of the Apostles in the Roman Lectionary put emphasis on Peter and Paul, on the new twelfth apostle, Mathias, on the deacon Stephen and the six men traditionally understood to be deacons in Acts 6 – as well as Paul, of course. Thus there is an appreciation of the persons of the apostles and a few other “official” ministers. The community as a whole is referred to in the reading used for Easter 2ABC.

The use of the Acts of the Apostles in the Revised Common Lectionary differs somewhat from that of the Roman Lectionary: the preaching of the word is more important than the persons who preach it.

Response: It would seem desirable to take a broader and more ecclesial approach, showing a church in which a wide variety of persons, female and male, are members and have teaching and leadership roles.

2. In addition, one of the central and difficult issues in the apostolic church had to do with the inclusion of gentiles. The Acts of the Apostles tells about risks taken in this regard, about disagreements and debates that followed, and about changes in understanding and practice that eventually resulted. The present lectionary readings give a skimpy view of this, at best.

Response: It would seem desirable to tell more of these important developments in the early church.

3. The structure of the Acts of the Apostles develops the story of the growth of the early church during the early years, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Yet most of the readings of the Roman Lectionary (18 out of 21) now come from only chapters 1-10 of Acts, with three from chapters 13-15. Likewise, most of the readings of the Revised Common Lectionary (17 out of 21) come from the same chapters 1-10 of Acts; four are taken from chapters 11, 16 and 17. It would seem desirable to include more of Acts.

Response: The entire scope of the Acts of the Apostles is represented in the proposed alternative lectionary readings.

Refocusing Liturgical Seasons

1. The use of passages from the Acts of the Apostles in the present lectionary seems not

only insufficiently ecclesial but also insufficiently paschal. At the present time, Acts can easily be understood as a “diary of the early church” that just happens to be read during the Easter season, though it does contain accounts of the Ascension and Pentecost.

Response: Instead, in my view, selections from Acts need to be appreciated as paschal readings, expressing the basic character of the Easter event.

2. The nature of the Easter season is not defined in any adequate way.

Response: I suggest that this is a baptismal season; scripture readings ought to speak of baptismal living.

Thus the Easter season extends, prolongs and reinforces the celebration of Easter over a period of eight Sundays, concluding with Pentecost; as well it includes the solemnity or festival of Ascension. To celebrate Easter is to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the paschal mystery. It is also to celebrate the experience and mystery of baptism through which Christians enter into that paschal mystery. It extends as well to the living out of the paschal mystery and of baptism in the daily lives of Christians: paschal living or baptismal living. The lectionary readings for the Easter season need consistently and effectively to express the meaning of Easter, baptism and baptismal living.

Baptismal living reflects a renewed relationship with God, with self, with other persons, and with the rest of creation. It does not simply pertain to the lives of individuals, however; it also has to do with the life of local Christian communities and the life of the church in all its manifestations. To live baptismally means at last the following.

1. To live in right relationship with the life-giving and just God of the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures.

2. To love God and neighbor, manifest and support life in the midst of death, and live in and with wisdom.

3. To encounter the Risen Christ in word, eucharist, and community.

4. To experience the peace, unity and abundant life of Christ’s friends and disciples in the Holy Spirit and through mutual love.

5. To participate in the community of God’s people, which witnesses to the love of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and in which diverse gifts for ministry are exercised by all.

6. To share life in a creative, justice-seeking, hospitable and inclusive community, whose life includes prayer, wisdom, teaching and learning, inquiry, discussion, risk-taking, discernment and change.

7. To live in loving relationships with other persons, especially those in need; this includes doing justice, sharing with others, showing compassion, taking care of the weak, being life-giving persons.

8. To experience and promote respect for Jews and Judaism.

9. To live in respectful relationship with the rest of creation.

In the present project, this baptismal perspective has been expressed by selecting scripture readings along the following lines.

Gospels

The gospel readings proposed here are mostly those now assigned in the lectionary, except that they are viewed from the perspective of baptismal living. A few small rearrangements have been made.

Easter 1. Baptismal living includes rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Easter 2. Baptismal living includes doubts and questions, reassurance and faith, and encounter with the risen Christ.

Easter 3. Baptismal living includes sharing sustenance with the risen Christ in the midst of the community.

Easter 4. Baptismal living includes experiencing abundant life in Jesus Christ.

Easter 5. Baptismal living includes living faithfully and fruitfully in Jesus Christ.

Easter 6. Baptismal living includes practicing the mutual love that Jesus commanded.

Easter 7. Baptismal living includes being thankful for Jesus' prayer on behalf of his friends, past, present and continuing.

Acts of the Apostles

As the present revisioning views Easter very much in terms of baptismal living, the readings from Acts need to pertain to the living out of baptism in the lives of Christians in the early church and today. I therefore propose that the three readings for Easter Sunday be accounts of baptism: that of the Ethiopian eunuch, that of Paul, and that of Lydia. These accounts also have to do with the issue of inclusion, which was a difficult and significant question in the early church. As stated in Galatians 3:28, there is the matter of male and female, of Jew and Greek, of slave and free, etc. These stories also tell us something about evangelization and the baptising communities and their ministers.

I therefore propose seven characteristics of baptismal living in the early church, which apply to our own times as well. The order in which these characteristics are placed is arbitrary; other

arrangements would also be satisfactory.

- Easter 1. Baptismal living includes the celebration and remembrance of baptism.
- Easter 2. Baptismal living includes preaching and witnessing near and far and in diverse circumstances.
- Easter 3. Baptismal living includes bearing with hardships and helping those who are treated badly.
- Easter 4. Baptismal living includes sharing with and caring for those in need.
- Easter 5. Baptismal living includes discussion, debate, change, communal decision-making, and mutual teaching and learning.
- Easter 6. Baptismal ministry includes exercising diverse gifts for ministry.
- Easter 7. Baptismal living includes fellowship, teaching, eucharist and prayer.

Hebrew Scriptures

I propose readings from the Hebrew Scriptures for all the Sundays and solemnities of the Easter season and for all three years of the lectionary cycle. They were chosen on the basis of the principle of source of faith with their own perpetual value, and in light of what Christians may refer to as baptismal living. It would of course be inappropriate to apply this phrase to passages from the Hebrew Scriptures. The term covenantal living may be used instead; here I speak of the life of God's people.

- Easter 1. God's people find life in the midst of death
- Easter 2. God's people find life in the midst of death
- Easter 3. God's people find life in the midst of death
- Easter 4. God's people live lives of love
- Easter 5. God's people live lives of fidelity.
- Easter 6. God's people live lives of wisdom
- Easter 7. God's people experience the presence of holy wisdom.
- Pentecost: God's people experience the creative and life-giving breath of God.

Three year cycle

I also follow the principle, already worked out above for the gospel readings, that, as much as possible, there be three separate readings for each Sunday for the three years of the lectionary cycle. Here, this means that there should be three separate readings for Easter Sunday instead of only one.

Present Second Readings

A question naturally arises regarding the place of the present second readings in this revised system of lectionary readings for the Easter Season. This matter is simply not considered here; these readings have been set aside for the moment.

However, the appreciation that the Introduction of the Revised Common Lectionary gives regarding these readings deserves to be noted:

As Acts becomes the first reading on these great Sundays, the apostolic reading (epistle) is taken from 1 Peter, the letters of John, and the book of Revelation. The purpose of this selection is to complement the Acts narrative of the formation and growth of the resurrection community with a theological commentary on the character of its inner life, namely, its mutual love, and its life of praise in anticipation of the fulfillment of the kingdom. (26)

EASTERTIDE: ALTERNATIVE ORDER OF READINGS

EASTER SUNDAY (FIRST SUNDAY OF EASTER)

Hebrew Scriptures

God's people find life in the midst of death.

Year A Hagar is saved from death and exile (Genesis 16:1-16)

Year B The widow's son is restored to life (1 Kings 17:17-24)

Year C Jonah is saved from the whale (Jonah 1:17 - 2:10)

Acts of the Apostles

*Baptismal living includes the celebration
and remembrance of baptism.*

Year A Baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)

Year B Baptism of Paul (Acts 9:10-19)

Year C Baptism of Lydia (16:11-15)

Third Reading (Gospel)

*Baptismal living includes rejoicing
in the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

Year A The empty tomb (John 20:1-10)

Year B The empty tomb and angelic reassurance (Matthew 28:1-10 or Mark 16:1-8)

Year C The empty tomb and angelic reassurance (Luke 24:1-12)

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Hebrew Scriptures

God's people find life in the midst of death.

Year A Joseph is saved from death (Genesis 37:12-28)

Year B The widow and Elijah are saved from death (1 Kings 17:8-16)

Year C The three youth are saved from death (Daniel 3:13-20, 24-26)

Acts of the Apostles

*Baptismal living includes preaching and witnessing
near and far and in diverse circumstances.*

Year A Peter preaches to the Roman army officer Cornelius and his companions (Acts 10:34-39a, 40-43)

Philip preaches and heals in Samaria, and Peter and John lay on hands there (Acts 8:4-8 [9-13], 14-17)

Year B In Athens, Paul preaches respectfully to worshipers of diverse deities (Acts 17:22-34)

Year C Paul preaches in Rome (Acts 28:15-16, 23-24, 30-31)

Third Reading (Gospel)

*Baptismal living includes doubts and questions,
reassurance and faith, and encounter with the risen Christ*

Year A Jesus and the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-27)

Year B Mary speaks with the risen Christ (John 20:1-18)

Year C Jesus appears twice; doubting Thomas (John 20:19-29)

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Hebrew Scriptures

God's people find life in the midst of death.

Year A Moses is saved from death (Exodus 1:15 - 2:10)

Year B Susanna's life is saved (Susanna / Daniel 13:15-49, 63)

Year C Daniel is saved from death (Daniel 6:7, 13-23)

Acts of the Apostles

*Baptismal living includes bearing with hardships
and helping those who are treated badly.*

Year A Disciples share what they have with those experiencing famine (Acts 11:27- 12:5)

Year B While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed for him (Acts 12:6-17)

Year C Paul healed a slave girl and he and Silas were unjustly imprisoned; the jailer took care of them, came to believe in Jesus, and was baptized (Acts 16:16-40)

Third Reading (Gospel)

*Baptismal living includes sharing sustenance
with the risen Christ in the midst of the community.*

Year A They recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:28-35)

Year B Jesus appears to the disciples (Luke 24:36-48)

Year C Jesus appears to the disciples (John 21:1-19)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Hebrew Scriptures

God's people live lives of love.

Year A Love of God (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

Year B Love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:1-4, 9-18)

Year C Mutual love (Song of Solomon 2:8-17; 4:1, 10-16)

Acts of the Apostles

Baptismal living includes sharing with and caring for those in need.

Year A The disciple named Tabitha was devoted to good works and acts of charity; she died but was restored to life (Acts 9:36-42)

Year B When certain widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, seven men were chosen and ordained to care for them (Acts 6:1-7)

Year C Everything the believers owned was held in common, and there was not a needy person among them (Acts 4:32-37)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Baptismal living includes experiencing abundant life in Jesus Christ.

Year A I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:1-10)

Year B I know my own and my own know me (John 10:11-18)

Year C I give them eternal life, and they will never perish (John 10:27-30)

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Hebrew Scriptures

God's people live lives of fidelity.

Year A Making just laws and redressing grievances (Numbers 27:1-8)

Year B God's blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)

Year C Choose life (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)

Acts of the Apostles

*Baptismal living includes discussion, debate, change,
communal decision-making, and mutual teaching and learning*

Year A Peter began to explain it to them (Acts 10:44-48; 11:1-18)

Year B The apostles and elders met together to consider this matter (Acts 15:1-21)

Year C Priscilla and Aquilla explained the Way of God to him (Acts 18:1-3, 18-19a, 24-27)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Baptismal living includes living faithfully and fruitfully in Jesus Christ.

Year A I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:1-14)

Year B Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you (John 14:23-29)

Year C Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit (John 15:1-8)

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Hebrew Scriptures

God's people live lives of wisdom

Year A Live according to wisdom (Sirach 51:13-21)

Year B Come to wisdom (Sirach 6:18-31)

Year C Wisdom teaches her children (Sirach 4:11-18)

Acts of the Apostles

Baptismal living includes exercising diverse gifts for ministry

Year A Four women prophets exercised their gifts in Ptolemais (Acts 21:7-14)

Year B In Antioch there were many prophets and teachers; Paul and Barnabas were set apart for missionary work in Cyprus (Acts 13:1-5)

Year C Many preached the good news in Antioch and many became believers; Barnabas was sent there to provide leadership (Acts 11:19-26)

Paul and Barnabas preached through Asia Minor, appointed leaders in each local church, and gave an account of their ministry when they returned to Antioch (Acts 14:21-28)

Third Reading (Gospel)

*Baptismal living includes practicing the mutual love
that Jesus commanded.*

Year A Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have care for one another (John 13:31-33a, 34-35)

Year B If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15-21)
Year C You are my friends if you do what I command you (John 15:9-17)

ASCENSION

Hebrew Scriptures

Year A The joys of wisdom (Proverbs 3:13-18)
Year B In praise of wisdom (Wisdom 7:21-30)
Year C The mystery of wisdom (Sirach 1:1-10)

Acts of the Apostles

Year ABC The account of the Ascension (Acts 1:1-11)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Year A All power is given to Christ (Matthew 28:16-20)
Year B Christ is exalted to the Father's side (Mark 16:15-20)
Year C Christ was taken up to heaven (Luke 24:44-53)

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Hebrew Scriptures

God's people experience the presence of holy wisdom

Year A Wisdom brings her people out of Egypt (Wisdom 10:15 - 11:5)
Year B Wisdom makes her dwelling (Sirach 24:1-12)
Year C Wisdom makes herself known (Wisdom 6:12-16)

Acts of the Apostles

*Baptismal living includes fellowship,
teaching, eucharist and prayer*

Year A In Troas, at the breaking of the bread, Paul preached a long time, and the boy Eutyches fell asleep (Acts 20:7-12)
Year B The Eleven, together with Mary and other women, devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:12-14)
Year C The early believers devoted themselves to the apostolic teaching and fellowship, to the

breaking of the bread and the prayers (Acts 2:41-47)

Third Reading (Gospel)

*Baptismal living includes being thankful
for Jesus' prayer on behalf of his friends,
past, present and continuing.*

Year A Eternal life is to know the one true God, and Jesus Christ (John 17:1-11a)

Year B Sanctify them in the truth (John 17:11b-19)

Year C That they may be one (John 20-26)

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Hebrew Scriptures

Year A The breath of life (Genesis 2:4b-10, 18, 21-25)

The tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)

God descended on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:3-8a, 16-20)

Year B Restoration and a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:1-34)

New breath in dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

Sons and daughters shall prophesy (Joel 2:28-32)

Year C Wisdom and the holy spirit (Wisdom 9:9-18)

Wisdom beside God at creation (Proverbs 8:22-31)

Acts of the Apostles

Year ABC Account of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11)

Third Reading (Gospel)

Year A Receive the Spirit (John 20:19-23)

Year B The Spirit of truth will testify (John 15:26-27; 16:12-15)

Year C The Holy Spirit will teach you everything (John 14:15-16, 23b-26)

ADVENT: ISSUES AND RESPONSES

Respect for Jews and Judaism

The following are issues, problematic readings, and proposed responses.

Christian Scriptures

Supersessionism

Advent C4 epistle (Hebrews 10:5-10)

(I come to do your will)

Response: set this reading aside

Hebrew Scriptures

Choice of readings on the basis of “messianic prophecy”

The Introduction to the Lectionary states that:

The Old Testament readings are prophecies about the Messiah and the Messianic age especially from Isaiah. (n 93b)

All the present readings from the Hebrew Scriptures are therefore problematic in this regard. These are:

Advent 1A (Isaiah 2:1-5) The Lord gathers all the nations

Advent 1B (Isaiah 63:16b-17; 1:3-8) You were angry, and we sinned

Advent 1C (Jeremiah 33:14-16) I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up

Advent 2A (Isaiah 11:1-10) A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse

Advent 2B (Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11) Prepare the way of the Lord

Advent 2C (Baruch 5:1-9) Arise... and see your children gather from west and east

Advent 3A (Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10) Then the eyes of the blind will be opened

Advent 3B (Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11) The spirit of the Lord God is upon me

Advent 3C (Zephaniah 3:14-18a) The Lord, your God, is in your midst

Advent 4A (Isaiah 7:10-14) Look the virgin is with child

Advent 4B (2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a-16) I will raise up your offspring after you

Advent 4C (Micah 5:2-5a) From you O Bethlehem

Response: I am uncomfortable with the principle of “messianic prophecy” as a method of selecting liturgical readings in this day and age. It lacks scholarly credibility and it fails to reflect modern thinking about relations between Christianity and Judaism. For the purposes of this study, therefore, this principle and individual readings based on it have been set aside. Here I seek to discern alternative principles for selecting readings from the Hebrew Scriptures for the Sundays of Advent and to identify individual alternative readings. In addition, some of the present readings dwell on Israel’s shortcomings.

The following eight alternative principles for selecting alternative readings for the Sundays of Advent are presented here. The first four are based on liturgical considerations, while the

second four are based on modern thinking about the relationship of Christianity and Judaism.

1. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will show an overall conceptual relationship to the season of Advent as a whole.

2. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will suitably “accompany” the several distinct perspectives found in the gospel readings for the Sundays of Advent.

3. Individual readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will not be tightly linked to individual gospel readings.

4. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will also present perspectives on Advent that are relatively independent from those of the gospels.

5. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures chosen for the Sundays of Advent will reflect the view that the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is one of continuity, not of discontinuity and supersessionism.

6. The choice of readings will reflect the position that the Hebrew Scriptures are source of faith with their own perpetual value.

7. The readings chosen will not regard Judaism in a negative manner and will not dwell on Israel’s shortcomings.

8. The readings chosen will acknowledge the Jewishness of Jesus.

Revisioning Church

Respecting Jews and Judaism, and increasing the visibility of women, are taken for granted here and taken into account in choosing alternative readings.

Refocusing Liturgical Seasons

The General Norms make the following statement regarding Advent:

Advent has a twofold character, as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered: as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation. (29)

The two perspectives named here are expanded to three in the description given in the Introduction of the Lectionary:

Advent. Sundays. Each gospel reading has a distinctive theme: the Lord’s coming at the

end of time (First Sunday of Advent), John the Baptist (Second and Third Sundays), and the events that prepared immediately for the Lord's birth (Fourth Sunday). (93)

(In this section I use the term perspective rather than theme.)

Several issues arise with respect to these statements about Advent.

1. They fail adequately to name the scope of Advent. As already indicated, one document lists two perspectives, another three. In addition, historical research shows two additional perspectives that once were included in Advent and that seem worthy of reconsideration today; I include these in the present study.

One of these alternative perspectives is the "recognition of the adult Jesus as the One sent by God." This recognition is a surprise; it is unexpected; it is gift. The other alternative perspective is baptism. If there are to be baptisms at Epiphany or on the feast of the Baptism of Jesus (in early January), then Advent inevitably becomes a period of baptismal preparation.

2. They fail to make the several perspectives of Advent more accessible or "digestible." There are several considerations in this regard. First, the season of Advent is quite short, only four Sundays. Second, in this brief period the focus of celebration changes (so far as the gospel readings are concerned) abruptly from the first Sunday (Second Coming) to the second and third Sundays (John the Baptist) to the fourth (preparation for the birth of Jesus). Third, the first, second and third readings for a given Sunday may all have to do with different perspectives. Fourth, the present arrangement of readings obscures the unity of Advent. The result is that no focus is developed in any depth in any single year of the three-year lectionary cycle. I believe that this is too much, too fast; the richness of Advent is difficult to assimilate or digest. Broadening the scope of Advent as described above introduces even greater challenges in this regard.

Two proposals regarding the structure of the lectionary for Advent are made here. First, in any single year, all four Sundays will focus on and develop a single perspective. For example, the Second Coming will be the focus of the gospel readings for all four Sundays in year A of the alternative cycle; John the Baptist for all four Sundays in alternative year B, etc.

A consequence of this proposal is that a three-year cycle is not sufficient; four years is the minimum. "Preparation for baptism" would be used only when pastorally appropriate, and its readings would replace one "regular" set of readings when this perspective is used.

3. They fail to integrate Advent's several temporal dimensions (past, present, future). There are several considerations in this regard. First, time and its several dimensions are particularly significant in Advent. Second, Advent is complex from a temporal point of view. Third, the relations between different dimensions of time are important and often oversimplified. Fourth, some important aspects of time often are ignored.

At the present time the gospels for the first Sundays are oriented toward the future (Second

Coming). Those for the fourth Sunday, in contrast, are heavily oriented toward the past (preparation for the birth of Jesus). I suggest that the gospel readings about John the Baptist, read on the second and third Sundays, are most commonly viewed in relationship to the birth of Jesus (as if John were Jesus' uncle rather than his cousin). Chronologically, of course, they are related to the adult life of Jesus, not his birth – but in either case an event of the past. The so-called messianic prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures are from the past and most often are thought of as foretelling a future (for the original author) that is past for us (birth of Jesus). Of course they are also related to the future (for us – the Age to Come), though this dimension tends to be neglected. The second readings largely have to do with the future.

Simplistic emphases either on the past or on the future carry the danger of ignoring the present – the “today” in which worshipers live. Contemporary liturgy attempts to be conscious of past, present and future in more sophisticated ways than sometimes was the case in the past. Certainly time in the liturgy is not considered in a linear, historical, either-or manner. Instead, past is brought into the present (anamnesis) and informs our view of the future. Future is already happening and signified in the present (prolepsis). The future is for today (“already”) but also for tomorrow (“not yet”). The idea that Advent has to do with “anticipation” or “expectation” also has its limitations. Whatever is only anticipated is future, not for “today”.

Balancing all three dimensions of time in the liturgy requires both understanding and imagination and may be a challenge for some. In addition, eschatology (the future dimension) generally speaking is not a high priority for the churches that use the lectionary. To some extent the concern and aim of revisioning is handled through the choice and arrangement of readings. In addition, introductions and rationales that accompany the readings for each perspective touch on this matter.

4. They fail to state or demonstrate the unity of Advent. The General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar do not even speak of unity within Advent, for example. They say simply that “Advent has a twofold character.” The document then names the Second Coming and the birth of Jesus, but does not explain where John the Baptist is in all this. On the other hand, the Introduction of the Revised Common Lectionary says that “Advent . . . is basically eschatological.” An emphasis on the Second Coming, of course, flies in the face of much popular appreciation of Advent, which focuses on the past birth of Jesus. These authoritative statements never speak of celebrating the Incarnation as a present reality, and also neglect to make clear the significance of John the Baptist.

Thus I feel that any unity that Advent might have is either not stated at all, or not demonstrated convincingly. In practice, the multiplicity of perspectives is not appreciated, even intellectually; they are not meaningful or helpful to many worshipers. Here I offer one possible view of the unity of Advent and locate the multiple perspectives expressed in the scripture readings and in the structure of the lectionary within this unity. Thus I suggest that:

Advent is the celebration of God's Plan for humanity and all of creation.

The term “God’s Plan” is inspired by passages such as the following:

With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:10)

...let the plan of the Holy One of Israel hasten to fulfillment, that we may know it. (Isaiah 5:19)

See also Isaiah 14:26, Micah 4:12 and Ephesians 3:9.

“Celebration” is used here to indicate that all of Advent is “for today,” even while it also has to do with past and with future.

Of course, every liturgical season and every Sunday could also be described in this way. It seems suitable, however, to express and emphasize this holistic view of God’s Plan for humanity and all of creation at the beginning of the liturgical year. This constitutes a summary and overview, which is then drawn out and contemplated at length and at leisure the rest of the year.

The three “perspectives” expressed in the present gospel readings of Advent, with the two additional perspectives described above, may all be related to the unifying description just stated. Thus these five perspectives may be titled as follows:

God’s Plan
and the Second Coming of Christ
and the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist
and the unexpected and surprising recognition of the adult Jesus
as the One sent by God
and the events leading up to the birth of Jesus
and baptism.

When the first and second readings are taken into account, the five perspectives are broadened and may be set forth as follows:

God’s Plan and the Age to Come
God’s Plan in Judgment and Grace
God’s Plan in Surprising and Unexpected Events and Persons
God’s Plan in Human Lives and Relationships
God’s Plan in Baptism.

Readings for the four Sundays of Advent and for each of these perspectives, are set out below.

ADVENT: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES AND READINGS

The several perspectives of Advent will now be described in greater detail. Readings have been sought that will suitably express each one. Finally, lists of individual readings are set out.

1

God's Plan and the Age to Come

God's plan for humanity and all of creation is greater than any experience of God's presence and grace yesterday or today. It remains to be fulfilled, completed and perfected tomorrow – in the future. This experience of fulfillment and perfection is referred to here as the Age to Come.

From one perspective, we “cannot imagine” what this perfected dream of God might “look like”. Our ancestors in faith, however, did try to envision the Age to Come based on their own experiences of God's gracious presence with them and on their own hopes and dreams. We today continue to be inspired by these visions but also express our hopes and expectations for the future in new ways, based on our own experiences of God and our own imaginations.

The Age of Come is still some time in the indefinite future, and we do not know when it will be reached; it is “not yet”. But it was anticipated in part in the life of Israel, was encountered and expressed in a particular way in Jesus Christ, and has continued to be anticipated in part by faithful Christians and Jews. It is, therefore, “already” and “for today” in that glimpses and partial experiences of it are encountered in our daily lives today. These need to be expected and valued, but not confused with the ultimate reality that we still anticipate.

We hope for, yearn for, await and expect this Age to Come. We commit ourselves to it and seek to do what we can to prepare for it – while always acknowledging that it is gift and surprise.

Readings have been sought that express the perspective of God's Plan and the Age to Come.

Gospels

The Age to Come is imaged as the Second Coming of Christ. Individual passages speak of:

- the need always to be vigilant
- the coming of Christ and the need to discern the times
- bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom: some are prepared and some are not
- the great judgment; the criterion to be used is care for our neighbor

First Reading

The Age to Come is imaged in a variety of ways:

- a time when war is no more
- God leading God's people home from exile
- the great jubilee; the sabbatical year
- experiencing the fullness of holy wisdom

Second Reading

One set of readings, from the epistles, speaks of the Age to Come as the Day of the Lord and how Christians are to live as they wait for it:

- God wants all to come to repentance
- the Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly; we therefore ought to lead good lives
- we are urged to be ready for the Day of the Lord and to live with Christ
- we should lead good lives as we await the Day of the Lord

Another set of readings uses images from the Book of Revelation:

- the servants of God gather to praise God
- a new heaven and earth and God's dwelling with all peoples
- being invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb
- the river of life, and Christ saying "I am coming soon"

The following list contains the re-visioned readings.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Beat swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:1-5)

Second Reading

A. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief (2 Peter 3:8-15a)

B. The seal of the living God (Revelation 7:2-12)

Gospel

Need for watchfulness (Matthew 24:36-44; *or* Mark 13:32-37; *or* Luke 21:34-36)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

I will restore the fortunes of my people (Jeremiah 30:1-3, 8-11a, 18-22)

or I will lead them back (Jeremiah 31:1-14)

or God will lead Israel with joy (Baruch 5:1-9)

Second Reading

- A. The coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
- B. A new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1-6)

Gospel

Coming of the Son of Man and lesson of the fig tree
(Matthew 24:29-35; *or* Mark 13:24-31; *or* Luke 21:25-33)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**First Reading**

The year of jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-12, 23-24, 35-43; 26:3-13)
or The sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 15:1-11)

Second Reading

- A. The day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)
- B. The marriage supper of the Lord (Revelation 19:6-10)

Gospel

The bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**First Reading**

Eat your fill of Wisdom's fruits (Sirach 24:1-2, 13-17, 19-22)
or Holy Wisdom in her fullness (Sirach 24:1-22)

Second Reading

- A. In the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11)
- B. See, I am coming soon (Revelation 22:1-5, 12-14, 16-17)

Gospel

Judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46)

2**God's Plan in Judgment and Grace**

God's plan for humanity and all of creation includes judgment. We are aware that our world, our church and our selves do not fully live up to God's plan, that at times we impede or get in its way, that we are not as ready for this plan as we ought to be, that we do not do all that we can to facilitate the perfecting of God's plan. We therefore need to be called to conversion and re-

commitment.

At the same time, God's plan and its fulfillment are purely God's gift and initiative; they are grace that cannot be earned or demanded. We respond to this grace with praise and thanksgiving in prayer and daily living. We remain open to receive this grace.

God's plan is appreciated and communicated especially by members of the community of faith whom we call prophets. They are seized by the plan and wholly committed to it; they care deeply about it; they communicate its immediacy and urgency. They help keep God's plan alive among humankind; they chide us with words of judgment; we are blessed with their message of grace.

There are prophets in every generation, but some, like Elijah and John the Baptist, are considered to be exceptional. Jesus also came as a prophet of particular distinction. There are prophets in our midst today; indeed the entire church is called to be prophetic.

Prophets remind us that God's plan is for today as well as tomorrow; they call us to recognize the grace of God's plan among us now; they call us to conversion now and urge us to prepare the way.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Plan in Judgment and Grace

Gospels

John the Baptist is a messenger and instrument of God's judgment and grace. Individual passages speak of:

- John's birth, the miraculous events surrounding his birth, the recognition of his special role as agent of judgment and grace
- John as witness to Jesus; the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as an event of God's grace
- John as preacher, particularly enunciating words of judgment
- John as prophet, the messenger of God

First Reading

Prophets arose in Israel to speak and act as instruments of God's judgment and grace; Elijah is an apt example:

- Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elisha were called by God and responded to this call
- God's grace in the life of Elijah; the widow who shared her food with him
- God's gracious presence to Elijah at Mount Horeb
- God's judgment when Elijah and the priests of Baal were in conflict

Second Reading

God's grace is spoken of in various ways; references are also made to prophets.

- the grace of God that has been given in Jesus Christ
- grace as gift of God
- prophets are examples of suffering and patience in the times leading up to the coming great judgment
- the words of prophets are to be both honored and tested.

The following list contains the re-visioned readings.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-13)
or Call of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1-10)
or Elisha took up the mantle of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-22)

Second Reading

Not lacking any spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 1:3-9)

Gospel

The birth of John (Luke 1:57-66, 80)
or Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79)
or The birth of John and song of Zechariah (Luke 1:57-80)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Elijah is fed by ravens and by the widow (1 Kings 17:1-16)

Second Reading

By grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Gospel

John the witness (John 1:6-9, 19-28; *or* John 1:29-34)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Elijah encounters God at Horeb (1 Kings 19:4-14)

Second Reading

The prophets who speak in God's name (James 5:7-10)

Gospel

John the preacher (Matthew 3:1-12; *or* Luke 3:1-17)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**First Reading**

Elijah bests the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:17-46)

Second Reading

The words of prophets (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)

Gospel

John the prophet (Matthew 11:2-15; *or* Luke 7:18-29)

3**God's Plan in Surprising and Unexpected Events and Persons**

God's plan for humanity and all of creation is revealed and experienced in unexpected and surprising ways: in persons and events where we are not looking for it; in times and places beyond our expectations. God's plan was a surprise to Israel, it was a surprise in the person and ministry of Jesus; it comes to surprise us today; and its completion in the Age to Come will also be a surprise.

We therefore need to expect the surprises of God's plan, to be always ready for unexpected graces. We need to learn to recognize God's surprises when they occur – and they occur every day; we need to accept that we cannot put limits on the creativity of God's plan or try to restrict its appearance in any way. This involves a letting go of control and rigidity and expressing a certain humility. But the experience of God's surprising plan should be of great joy and comfort to us.

God's plan in the unexpected can be a challenge to us individually and as church: Are we ready? Are our eyes wide open? Can we discern God's presence and action? We can be tempted to refuse or reject the surprises of God's plan; we can find them shocking and demanding, they can make us uncomfortable. God's plan is always reliable, but also a continuing surprise.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Plan in Unexpected and Surprising Events and Persons.

Gospel

In the course of his public ministry, Jesus was recognized as the One sent by God; this recognition was unexpected, a surprise. Individual passages tell us that:

- Jesus was recognized as a great prophet; it was appreciated that in Jesus the kingdom of

God had come near

- Jesus was recognized as the Son of God; he was called the prophet
- Jesus was recognized by the nameless women, who anointed him with ointment
- Jesus was recognized as the “one who comes” in the “Palm Sunday procession”

First Reading

God’s presence and action was manifested in exceptional or surprising ways during the life and history of Israel. Individual passages speak of:

- God’s surprising presence in the burning bush; the amazing blooming of Aaron’s staff
- the unexpected feeding of the people with manna; the falling of dew on Gideon’s fleece
- God’s holy wisdom in the life of Israel’s forebearers
- God’s presence and action in holy wisdom, directing Israel during the exodus

Second Reading

The lives of Jesus’ followers are marked by surprises, especially because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Individual passages speak of:

- the variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit that are found in the members of the community
- the mutual love and forgiveness that characterizes members of the church
- the wisdom of God that appears to be foolishness
- the life of the Spirit in the baptized, a spirit of life and adoption.

The following list contains the re-visioned readings:

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6)
or Aaron’s staff blooms (Numbers 17:1-9)

Second Reading

Varieties of gifts but the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-13)

Gospel

A great prophet has risen among us (Luke 7:11-17)
or The kingdom of God has come near (Luke 10:1-12)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Manna in the desert (Exodus 16:4-8, 22-26)
or Dew falls on Gideon’s fleece (Judges 6:36-40)

Second Reading

Bless those who persecute you (Romans 12:9-21)

Gospel

Rabbi, you are the Son of God (John 1:35-51)

or This is indeed the prophet who is to come (John 6:5-14)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**First Reading**

Holy Wisdom in the life of Israel: Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Lot
(Wisdom of Solomon 10:1-8)

Second Reading

The wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5)

Gospel

A woman anoints Jesus' head (Matthew 26:6-13; *or* Mark 14:3-9)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**First Reading**

Wisdom with Moses, at the passage through the Red Sea, and with the People of Israel in the desert (Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21; 11:1-14)

Second Reading

Led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:11-17)

Gospel

Blessed is the one who comes (Matthew 21:1-11; *or* Luke 19:29-40)

4**God's Plan in Human Lives and Relationships**

God's plan for humanity and all of creation is revealed and experienced precisely in human lives and in relationships among humans, between humans and God, and between humans and the rest of creation. It is expressed in the unfolding of God's creation in humankind, in all love and life-giving, pregnancy and childbirth, growing up, growing old, and dying.

God's plan is experienced in the persistence and growth of the human community over so many generations; in the lives of those whose names are remembered and in the lives of all whose names are forgotten. The lives and relationships of every person, past, present and future, are significant for God's plan.

Israel and the Jewish people, and their relationship with God, are an important part of God's plan, as is Jesus and all who have followed him in the church through the centuries.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Plan in Human Lives and Relationships.

Gospels

Individual passages speak of the Jewish and the human context leading up to the birth of Jesus.

- selected forefathers and foremothers of Jesus are named
- God's invites Mary to bear Jesus, and she accepts
- God's invites Joseph, through dreams, to accept Mary's pregnancy
- The pregnant Mary visits the pregnant Elizabeth

First Reading

Individual passages speak of the lives of the people of Israel through the ages.

- Israel is propagated through many generations through parents and offspring
- the history of Israel included many wondrous births
- Israel dreamed and interpreted dreams
- bold women in Israel were faithful to God's call

Second Reading

Individual passages speak of members of the church community and their relationships.

- Paul speaks of the origins of his ministry and of his relationship with the apostles; all who believe are considered to be descendants of Abraham; relationships between Jews and Gentiles in Christ
- within families of believers, mothers and grandmothers pass on the faith; women and men work together in serving the church
- good relationships should exist between ministers of the church, both within their families and in the Christian community
- Paul had great affection for the community that he founded; our relationship with God as adopted children

The following list contains the re-visioned readings:

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Genealogy of Israel: Descendants of Adam, Abraham, Israel, David

(1 Chronicles 1:1-10, 28-37; 2:1-4; 3:1-4)

Second Reading

God called me through grace (Galatians 1:11-24)

or Descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9)

or For Jews and Gentiles (Romans 15:7-13)

Gospel

Genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Annunciation of the birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16:7-12)

or Annunciation of the birth of Isaac (Genesis 17:5-22 *or* Genesis 18:1-15)

or Annunciation of the birth of Samson (Judges 13:2-25)

or The birth of Samuel; his parents and the song of Hannah

(1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:10)

Second Reading

The faith of grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:1-7)

or Acknowledge Phoebe, Prisca, Junia (Romans 16:1-7)

Gospel

Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The dream of Jacob (Genesis 28:10-17)

or The dream of Job (Job 33:13-18)

or Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 40:1-23 *or* 41:1-36)

or Daniel interprets the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2)

Second Reading

How bishops and deacons are to live (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

or How bishops are to live (Titus 1:4-9)

Gospel

Annunciation to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Tamar (Genesis 38:6-30)
or Rahab (Joshua 2:1-21; *and/or* Joshua 6:15-25)
or Ruth (Ruth 4:9-22)
or Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2-5, 26-27; 12:15b-18, 24-25)

Second Reading

You are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:17 -- 3:13)
or Adoption as children and heirs (Galatians 4:4-7)

Gospel

Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth and song of Mary (Luke 1:39-56)

5**God's Plan in Baptism**

God's plan for humanity and all of creation continues after the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. One expression of God's plan continues in Judaism; another expression is in Islam; others in other religions and peoples.

The expression of God's plan that is of particular significance for us is the church, Christ's body alive today in the Holy Spirit. Its life of community, worship, witness and doing justice are signs of God's plan – already but not yet. Women and men, girls and boys are embraced by God and themselves embrace God and enter into the Christian expression of God's plan through baptism, which is not just an event but also a way of living.

The baptism of adults may suitably be preceded by a period of preparation that includes discernment and learning what baptismal living is by seeing how baptized persons actually do live. When baptism is celebrated on the Epiphany or feast of the Baptism of Christ (in early January), the period of preparation will naturally include December and the liturgical season of Advent.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Plan in Baptism.

Gospel

Individual passages tell how Jesus speaks of the water of life, and how he himself is baptized by John:

- Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he is the source of the water that gives eternal life
- Jesus spoke of the necessity of being reborn of water and the Holy Spirit
- John the Baptist baptized people in the Jordan, spoke of the One to come who was greater

- than he, and baptized Jesus
- disciples followed Jesus after his baptism.

First Reading

The Christian imagination sees a variety of images that may suitably be related to baptism.

- the flood; the healing of Naaman in the Jordan
- the anointing of Aaron as priest; the anointing of David as king
- holy wisdom, which is likened to a splendid robe one wears; wisdom is water that is drunk
- holy wisdom, which is likened to entering into a relationship with God that is described as friendship.

Second Reading

Characteristics of baptism are named, as are some of the consequences of baptism in our lives.

- the baptized should strive for unity and peace
- the baptized are described as the “first fruits of salvation” through sanctification, belief and proclamation
- the baptized are “destined for adoption as children [of God] through Jesus Christ”
- Christ is the basis for unity among humans; how the baptized should live.

The following list contains the re-visioned readings.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The flood (Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; *or* 8:6-19; *or* 9:8-19)
or The cleansing of Naaman in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-14)

Second Reading

There is one baptism (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Gospel

Source of living waters (John 4:5-42)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The anointing of Aaron (Leviticus 8:1-12)
or The anointing of David (1 Samuel 16:1-13)

Second Reading

Chosen by God (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17)

Gospel

Born of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-21)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

You will wear wisdom like a glorious robe (Sirach 6:18-31)
or She will give the waters of wisdom to drink (Sirach 15:1-10)

Second Reading

God destined us for adoption (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Gospel

Baptism of Jesus by John (Luke 3:15-22)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Those that get wisdom obtain friendship with God (Wisdom of Solomon 7:1-14)

Second Reading

No longer slaves and free (Colossians 3:9-17)

Gospel

Call of the first disciples (John 1:35-42)

