

The word, lectionary, comes from a Latin word meaning to read. A lection is a reading. The same Latin root word gives us the modern word, lecture, which originally was a paper that was read to a class. Generally, a lectionary is a list of scriptural texts (called "lections") recommended for use in worship or study on a particular day.

Many religious traditions have sacred texts that are read, taught, or proclaimed on a regular basis, whether or not these are called lectionaries. Jewish lectionaries include a yearly schedule of readings from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), with a reading from the Prophets. With Muslims, they divide the Koran into thirty parts and read one part each day at prayers during the month of Ramadan. Some try to do this every month. The first Christian lectionaries followed Jewish traditions and added in the Gospels and letters of the New Testament over time. Catholic lectionaries were historically one-year lectionaries of Gospel and epistle readings that were repeated every year. There were differences through the centuries and with different Catholic traditions. Similarly with Eastern Orthodox churches and their various traditions.

After Vatican II, the idea of a three-year cycle came about, and a Catholic three-year lectionary was published in 1969. Later revised, it stood as a foundation for the Common Lectionary of 1983, which was developed by several American and Canadian denominations, all interested in proclaiming the unity of the church and sharing common readings at Sunday worship. These churches sent representatives to what is now known as the Consultation on Common Texts (see <http://www.commontexts.org>). After testing and evaluation, the Revised Common Lectionary of 1992 was published. Many churches now use the RCL, including Presbyterian, Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, and many other denominations and traditions around the world.

Christian lectionaries are usually built around what is called the Church Year. It includes a reading for each Sunday from the Old Testament, a Psalm, a reading from the Epistles or Letters, and a Gospel reading. The Revised Common Lectionary is a three-year cycle of weekly lections or readings featuring one of the synoptic gospels for each year (Year A – Matthew, Year B – Mark, Year C – Luke). The RCL is built around the seasons of the Christian Year, and includes additional readings for major festival or feast days (as observed by different traditions and churches).

The seasons of the Christian Year reflect the life of Christ. Consequently, the gospel lections for each Sunday provide the focus for that day and for that week. The other lections generally have a thematic relationship to the gospel reading for that day, although this is not always the case.

The Gospel of John is used each year at Christmas, Lent, and Easter, as well as to round out Year B, since Mark is not as long as the other two. Readings from the Gospel of John can be found throughout the RCL.

Seasons of the Church Year:

- **Advent** - *The Season of Expectation* - Beginning four Sundays prior to Christmas Day, the season of Advent is a time when the Church looks toward the second coming of Jesus and

¹Material is derived from the online resources of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library [especially the material in their Frequently Asked Questions (<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/faq.php>)], and from the Consultation on Common Texts, which developed the Revised Common Lectionary (http://www.commontexts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/RCL_Introduction_Web.pdf).

the eternal hope of Christians in the end of time. The color for this season is either Purple (for royalty) or Blue (for the Virgin Mary).

- **Christmas** - *The Season of Incarnation* - For 12 days, from Christmas Day (December 25) through Epiphany (January 6) (inclusive) the Church celebrates the miraculous incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. The color for this season is White.
- **Lent** - *The Season of Reflection* - For forty days (not including Sundays) prior to Easter Sunday the Church reflects on the suffering of Jesus. Together, we approach the cross. Worship during this period is traditionally more subdued and penitential. Many people also fast during the season of Lent. The color for this season is Purple.
- **Holy Week** - The final week of Lent is called "Holy Week." Often churches that do not typically meet for worship will meet every day of Holy Week. At the minimum, they will worship on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The color for Holy Week remains Purple, although some churches use Red on Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday. Some churches also use Black on Good Friday.
- **Easter** - *The Season of Resurrection* - For fifty days beginning on Easter Sunday Christians celebrate the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus and the certain hope of their own resurrection. The color for Easter is White. This season ends on the Sunday of Pentecost, for which the color is Red.
- **Ordinary Time** – *The Season of Nurture and Growth* - The periods of time following Epiphany and Pentecost are referred to as "Ordinary" because their Sundays are numbered in ordinal fashion (1, 2, 3, etc.). The focus of Ordinary Time is on developing a deeper understanding of Christian discipleship, becoming more like Christ. The color for this season is Green (for growth). *The Season after Pentecost* is sometimes called *Kingdomtide*.

To quickly look up the readings for the next Sunday, try this link:

<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>.

A typical lectionary table might look something like this:

Liturgical Date	Calendar Date	First Reading with Psalm	Alternate First reading with Psalm	Second Reading	Gospel Reading
Proper 11 (16)	23-July-23	Genesis 28:10-19a and Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24	Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16-19 or Isaiah 44:6-8 and Psalm 86:11-17	Romans 8:12-25	Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Notice politically correct column headings: First Reading with Psalm means the Old Testament reading. Sometimes instead it will say Hebrew or Hebrew Bible. Alternate First Reading is the traditional Complementary Reading, which means the Old Testament Reading and Psalm that reflect or complement the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading is simply the New Testament reading, which relates to the Gospel reading for that Sunday.

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