The contents of the missal are as universal as any in Christianity and provide a fascinating study of constancy.

Thus the contents of several of the liturgical books seem to witness to those constants of Christian worship for which we are looking. The Reformation merely took to its logical end the processes of compression and standardization already well under way in Roman Catholicism. Some of the Reformers managed to compress calendar, breviary, ritual, processional, pontifical, and missal into a single volume. For centuries, various Protestant martyrologies were widely used for devotional reading. People and clergy shared the same books. The results—whether in the Book of Common Prayer, the Book of Common Order, John Wesley’s Sunday Service, or various others—are remarkably similar in their consensus in regard to the essentials of Christian worship. The latest liturgical books, currently The United Methodist Book of Worship (1992) and the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship (1993), serve the same functions (if in newer forms) of the books whose gradual evolution we have been tracing.

Of course, there are differences between books of the same type. The comparative study of rites is known as liturgiology and, in the last hundred years, has become a highly specialized science. But the striking fact that remains is the remarkable degree of constancy in agreement among these books from differing times and places about which deep human needs are reflected in, and addressed through, worship.

This quick survey of the phenomenon, definitions, and key words of Christian worship, along with the discussion of diversity and constancy in such worship, will, I hope, help the reader reflect on what he or she means by Christian worship. Further reading will expand this understanding.
and spatial settings to it all: “At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon” (John 10:22-23). And when his work is done, Jesus is put to death on a specific day, related to the passover festival of that particular year, and rises on the third day. It is all part of the same time we inhabit—time that is measured by a spatial device, the calendar—the time in which we buy groceries, wash the car, and earn a living.

The centrality of time in Christianity is reflected in Christian worship. This worship, like the rest of life, is structured on recurring rhythms of the week, the day, and the year. In addition, there is a lifelong cycle. Far from trying to escape time, Christian worship uses time as one of its essential structures. Our present time is used to place us in contact with God’s acts in time past and future. Salvation, as we experience it in worship, is a reality based on temporal events through which God is given to us. The use of time enables Christians to commemorate and experience again those very acts on which salvation is grounded.

Time is also a language of communication in our daily life (as when we are habitually late for unpleasant engagements). It is a form of communication used with significantly different meanings in differing cultures. (In some cultures, being late for an appointment is a token of respect to someone important, testifying that he or she is obviously a very busy person.) Christianity builds on the natural human sense of time as a conveyer of meaning by fluently speaking the language of time in its worship.

In order to understand how the structures of Christian worship speak through the use of time, we need to explore the past experiences of Christians who structured worship on the basis of time, the theological rationales for so doing, and how time functions in current practice. Through study of these historical, theological, and pastoral dimensions, we can grasp a functional understanding of how time provides the foundation for so much of Christian worship.

THE SHAPING OF CHRISTIAN TIME

The way we use our time is a good indication of what we consider to be of prime importance in life. We can always be counted on to find time for those things we consider most important though we may not always be willing to admit to others, or even to ourselves, what our real priorities are. Whether it is making money, political action, or family activities, we find the time for putting first those things that matter most to us. Time talks. When we give time to others, we are really giving ourselves to them. Not only does our use of time show what is important to us but it also indicates who or what is most significant to our lives. Time, then, is a definite representation of our priorities. We reveal what we value most by how we allocate this limited resource.

The same is true of the church. The church shows what is most important to its life by the way it uses time. Here again the use of time reveals priorities of faith and practice. One answer to What do Christians believe? could be, look at how they keep time! How have Christians kept time in the past?

The earliest portions of the New Testament are imbued with a sense of time as kairos, the right or proper time present in which God has accomplished a new dimension of reality: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15). Yet already within the New Testament itself, we see a tendency to look back, to recall past times in which things had happened. The eschatological hope, that is, the belief that the last times were at hand, seems to be slackening by the time Luke writes his Gospel and the writing of church history begins with the book of Acts. Even before the first century is done, remembering comes to be almost as important as anticipating.

The priorities of the early church’s faith are disclosed by the way Christians of the second, third, and fourth centuries organized time. This was not systematic or planned; it was simply the church’s spontaneous response to “the events that have been fulfilled among us” (Luke 1:1). The same type of response, the perpetuation of memories, also prompted the writing of the Gospels so that others might be able to follow these events “handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (Luke 1:2). The structuring of time was not quite so systematic as the evangelists’ efforts “to write an orderly account” (Luke 1:3), but its influence has been almost as consistent in shaping Christian memories as it has been in the written
Gospels. Thus, for Christians, Easter is an annual event just as much as it is a written narrative. Christmas is far more a yearly occurrence than a nativity story.

What was the faith of the church of the first four centuries as witnessed to by the church’s use of time? It was, above all else, faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, it was trust in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, known and experienced in the holy church. And it was belief that witnessed to those signs by which God had become manifest in human flesh as Jesus Christ. This may not be a systematic summation of Christian belief; but it gives a clear indication of the heart of the faith of the early church, a faith revealed by how the church kept time.

There was even an implicitly trinitarian structure: belief in the Father made manifest, the Son risen, and the Holy Spirit indwelling the church. This, however, should not be pushed too far since it is more implicit than explicit. But the priorities are clear. The history of how the early church kept time may help us reconsider our priorities today in light of these precedents of the heroic age of Christianity.

The evidence begins not with the Christian year but with the Christian week, particularly with the testimony of Sunday. And the story really begins with the first day of creation, when “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. . . . And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” (Gen. 1:3-5). The four Gospels are all careful to state that it was on the morning of the first day, that is, the day on which creation began and God “separated the light from the darkness,” that the empty tomb was discovered.

In at least three places, the New Testament indicates a special time for worship—probably Sunday. Paul told the Christians in Corinth to set aside money for the collection on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). At Troas, after talking until midnight on Saturday, Paul broke bread (presumably the eucharist) and remained in conversation with Christians there until Sunday dawned (Acts 20:7 and 11). John tells us he “was in the spirit on the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10). The term “Lord’s day” had become a Christian term for the first day of the week by the early second century. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote around A.D. 115 to the Christians in Magnesia and spoke of those who “ceased to keep the [Jewish seventh day] Sabbath and lived by the Lord’s Day, on which our life as well as theirs shone forth, thanks to Him and his death.”

The Didache, a church order written sometime in the late first or early second century, reminds Christians literally “on the Lord’s day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold eucharist.” And even pagans noticed that “on an appointed day they [Christians] had been accustomed to meet before daybreak” though Pliny, the Roman administrator in Bithynia, who wrote those words about A.D. 112, hardly understood this to mean a meeting for the Lord’s Supper.

Another term appeared by the middle of the second century. Writing in Rome, the second-century apologist, Justin Martyr told his pagan audience about A.D. 155, that “we all hold this common gathering on Sunday since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead on the same day.” Christians soon adopted the newly coined pagan term “Sunday” and compared Christ rising from the dead to the rising sun. Even today, the English and German languages speak of “Sunday” while French and Italian refer to the “Lord’s Day.” The Epistle of Barnabas called Sunday “an eighth day, that is the beginning of another world . . . in which Jesus also rose from the dead.” The themes of creation, both original and new, and light are important dimensions in the Christian celebration of Sunday as the day of the resurrection.

Sunday was a day of worship for Christians but not yet of rest. It was made such by the Emperor Constantine in A.D. 321, “All judges, city people, and craftsmen shall rest on the venerable day of the Sun. But countrymen may without hindrance attend agriculture.”

The week had even more contour to it for the early church. Luke tells of the Pharisee who said: “I fast twice a week” (18:12). But the Didache, in all seriousness, told Christians: “Your fasts must not be identical with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Mondays and Thursdays; but you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.”7 Commemorative reasons had appeared for this by the time of writing of a late-fourth-century document, the Apostolic Constitutions...
The Language of Time

(probably in Syria), stated: “Fast... on the fourth day of the week, ... Judas then promising to betray Him for money; and... on [Friday] because on that day the Lord suffered the death of the cross.” There is evidence that some early Christians also held a certain regard for Saturday as “the memorial of the creation” from which work God rested on the seventh day. Tertullian, an early third-century North African, tells us there were “some few who abstain from kneeling on the Sabbath.” All these other days were inferior in importance to Sunday.

Sunday dominated all of the other days as the weekly anniversary of the resurrection. In the early church, Sunday also commemorated the Lord’s passion and death, but it was, above all else, the day on which the Savior rose from the dead. Even today, Sunday takes precedence over most other observances. Every Sunday witnesses to the risen Lord. It is the Lord’s Day, the day of the sun risen from darkness, the start of the new creation. Tertullian tells us Christians never knelt on Sunday, “the day of the Lord’s resurrection.” Sundays in Advent and Lent remain days of joy despite being penitential seasons. Each Sunday testifies to the resurrection. Every Sunday is a weekly little Easter but even more so every Easter is a yearly great Sunday. The primacy of Sunday and the resurrection is clear.

Even the ordinary day itself became a structure of praise for the early church. The Didache instructed Christians to pray the Lord’s Prayer “three times a day.” Late in the fourth century, Chrysostom urged each newly baptized Christian to begin the day’s work with prayer for strength to do God’s will and to end the day by rendering “an account to the Master of his whole day, and beg forgiveness for his falls.” Early in the Christian tradition, then, the Christian day led to a daily cycle of remembering Christ throughout one’s daily labors in the midst of worldly concerns. (This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.)

Christians adopted the Jewish sense of the day as beginning at nightfall (“There was evening and there was morning, the first day.” Gen. 1:5). Hence the eve of a festival (Christmas Eve, Easter Eve, and Halloween) is a part of the liturgical day that continues at daybreak and ends at sundown. Christians have made relatively little use of the month as a recurring cycle although Anglicans
formerly used it as a basis for daily psalm readings and some
Protestants currently observe monthly celebrations of the
eucharist.

As the week and the day witnessed to Jesus Christ, so too, the
Christian year (liturgical year or church year) became a structure
that commemorated the Lord. Just as Sunday was the center of the
week, so too, the Pascha (Passover-Easter) happenings was the
focus of the year. The Pascha had been the center of the Jewish year
as commemoration of deliverance from slavery; it was no less
important for Christians. Paul deliberately took over the language
of the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread (the Pascha):

Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are
unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore,
let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and
evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:7-8)

This passage is the chief evidence for the keeping of Easter by the
New Testament church. The old Jewish commemoration of deliv-
erance was now made completely new in Jesus Christ. Slavery and
redemption were rehearsed, but in the new sense of release from
sin and death through Christ’s actions.

The second-century and third-century church observed the
Pascha with services signifying the making of new Christians
through the acts of baptism, laying on of hands, anointing, and first
communion. Just as the Pascha had commemorated escape from
slavery by passage through the Red Sea, so Paul saw baptism as a
burial with Christ in which “we have been buried with him by bap-
tism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead . . .
so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4-5). In the first
three centuries, Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection were com-
memorated together at the Pascha. Tertullian tells us that “the
Passover affords a more than usually solemn day for baptism;
when, withal, the Lord’s passion in which we are baptized, was
completed.” 10

An early third-century document, The Apostolic
Tradition, usually attributed to Hippolytus, tells us that those who
were to be baptized fasted on Friday and Saturday, presumably
before Easter, and then began an all-night vigil Saturday evening.
At cockcrow, the hour of the resurrection on Easter morning,

they were baptized beneath the waters and rose with Christ as
from the dead.

Early in the fourth century, the church finally agreed that, unlike
the Jewish Passover, which could come on any day of the week, the
Pascha must always be celebrated on a Sunday. Previously, the
Quartodeciman controversy had involved a long debate between
those who kept Easter on a Sunday and those (the Quarto-
decimans) who followed the Jewish dating which often resulted in
a weekday celebration. The resolution of this controversy clearly
recognized the symbolic meaning of Sunday: “Never on any day
other than the Lord’s Day should the mystery of the Lord’s res-
urrection from the dead be celebrated . . . on that day alone we
should observe the end of the Paschal fast.” 11 Thus the weekly and
yearly cycles of resurrection reinforced each other, but a small part
of the Jewish roots of the Passover were lost.

In the course of the fourth century, the ancient unitive Pascha
day which commemorated all the events of the last days of Jesus,
including the crucifixion and resurrection, was divided into dis-
tinct commemorations (see diagram 5). The dissolution apparently
first occurred in Jerusalem where time and space converged at the
sites of Jesus’ life and ministry. A need was felt to hold a separate
commemoration for each event at the holy place where it had
occurred in order to serve the throngs of pilgrims who were arriv-
ing from all over the world. Scripture was mined for evidence
about the time and place of all the events of Christ’s last week in
Jerusalem. We have a good idea of what had developed by A.D. 383
as chronicled in the writings of a Spanish woman named Egeria.
Her notes, apparently written down so she could give talks to
friends at home, have survived and give us a clear picture of how
late-fourth-century Jerusalem had developed its way of keeping

time.

Egeria tells us that what we now call Passion Sunday or Palm
Sunday, or the first day of Holy Week, was “the beginning of the
Easter Week or, as they call it here, ‘The Great Week.’ . . . All the
people go before him [the bishop] with psalms and antiphons, all
the time repeating, ‘Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the
Lord.’” 12 There were minor services on the next three days, except
on Wednesday the presbyter read about Judas’ plot to betray Jesus

—— 55 ——
and “the people groan and lament at this reading.” On Thursday, after everyone had received communion, all “conduct the bishop to Gethsemane.” And on Friday, services were held at Golgotha where fragments of the wood of the cross were venerated by all the people. They processed past the cross and kissed it.

By the end of the century, the historicizing process was complete, and Augustine stated as an accepted fact that “it is clear from the Gospel on what days the Lord was crucified and rested in the tomb and rose again” and that the church has “a requirement of retaining those same days.”13 The ancient unitive Pascha had been broken into separate commemorations: Maundy or Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and the Easter Vigil on the eve of Easter, along with Passion or Palm Sunday and the three lesser days of Holy Week. And this is how Christians have kept it ever since. This gives us Holy Week beginning with Passion or Palm Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, (Spy) Wednesday, Maundy or Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The English term “Easter” comes from the Old English eastre, a pagan spring festival; Romance languages still use forms of “Pascha.” Easter Day is the beginning of Easter Week during which new Christians receive instruction.

Closely connected with Easter are two seasons: Lent and the long Easter Season. The origins of Lent are controversial. It was customary to think that Lent originated as the final intensive period of preparation for those catechumens (converts under training) who had been set apart, after considerable preparation, to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. New evidence shows a possibly earlier stand, a post-Epiphany fast of forty days in Egypt, associated with Christ’s forty days in the wilderness, which immediately follows the account of his baptism in the Synoptic Gospels.14 At any rate, the Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325, first referred to Lent as “forty days” and made it immediately precede Easter. Around A.D. 350, Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem told those about to be baptized, “You have a long period of grace, forty days for repentance.”15 By Augustine’s time, Lent, that “part of the year . . . adjoining . . . and touching on the Lord’s passion,” had become a time of preparation for all Christians, baptized or not. It begins on a day much later known as Ash Wednesday because of the imposition of ashes on the fore-
heads of all Christians, a practice dating at least from the late-eleventh century. The Sundays in Lent are not counted as part of the forty days.

Far more important was the **Easter Season**, the fifty days extending the celebration of Easter through the Day of Pentecost. The great fifty days (originally called “the Pentecost”) were at first far more important than the forty days of Lent. It is perplexing why modern Christians concentrate on Lent, the season of penance, rather than on Easter, the season of rejoicing. Augustine tells us: “These days after the Lord’s resurrection form a period, not of labor, but of peace and joy. That is why there is no fasting and we pray standing, which is a sign of resurrection. This practice is observed at the altar on all Sundays, and the Alleluia is sung, to indicate that our future occupation is to be no other than the praise of God.”[^16] The resurrection is commemorated by a day each week—Sunday; a festival each year—Easter Day; and a season—the Easter Season. There can be no doubt about the centrality of the resurrection in the life and faith of the early Church.

The most significant development in the fourth-century calendar was the elaboration of Holy Week. Much of this elaboration occurred in Jerusalem, very likely under the leadership of **Cyril of Jerusalem**, bishop from A.D. 349 to 386. Egeria gives us a full report of what was being done in Jerusalem shortly before Cyril’s death. Eventually, the Jerusalem practices became common throughout Christianity and represent some of the church’s oldest liturgical treasures.

These rites employ the most dramatic forms used in Christian worship. Indeed, medieval drama sprang from Easter Day worship but eventually became too complicated to remain in the chancels. It was natural that Jerusalem should be the place where such dramatic rites developed, for the actual settings of the events leading up to and following Jesus’ death and resurrection were at hand. Ever since Constantine had made Christianity respectable, all pilgrims had been flocking to see those places for themselves. All that was needed for liturgical realism was to match the times and places mentioned in scripture with appropriate ceremonies. Jerusalem mentioned in scripture with appropriate ceremonies. Jerusalem mentioned in scripture scores of times in the fourth century and has shaped Christian worship ever since. Revived in fuller form in 1955 under Pius XII, the rites of Holy Week were reform after Vatican II and now also appear in many Protestant service books.

The fully developed rites include on Passion or Palm Sunday an opening procession with palms and a dramatic reading (usually with several readers) of one of the passion narratives from the Gospels. Maundy Thursday begins in Roman Catholic and Anglican cathedrals with the **chrism mass** in which the three sacramental oils used in parish churches during the year—olive oil for baptism, chrism (olive oil and balm) for confirmation, and olive oil for anointing of the sick—are consecrated. The unity of the priests of the diocese with their bishop is testified to by the presence of representative priests from the diocese at this service. The **Easter Triduum** (three days) extends from sunset on Maundy Thursday to sunset on Easter Day—the three most holy days of the Christian year. Maundy Thursday evening is marked in most churches by a eucharist commemorating both Christ’s gift in giving this sacrament at this time and the events of his passion that followed. Often, **foot washing** is included (John 13:3-17), and at the conclusion of the service the **stripping of the church** may occur in which all textiles, crosses, and images are removed or covered until Easter eve.

Traditionally, the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated on Good Friday or **Holy Saturday**, the Netherlands Reformed Church being an exception. The ancient Good Friday rite includes the service of the word with extensive intercessions, **veneration of the cross** (kneeling before it or kissing it), the singing of the **reproaches** (based on Lam. 1:12), and possibly, giving of communion with elements consecrated on Maundy Thursday. A seventeenth-century Hispanic rite from Peru, the **Three Hours** is based on the seven last words of Jesus from the cross. The service of **tenebrae** (darkness) may occur on any or all of the last three days of Holy Week with the reading of either psalms along with lessons or the passion narrative; in either case, the service includes the gradual extinguishing of candles on a special large candlestick.

**Easter Eve** climaxes the whole year with the **Easter Vigil** as the church gathers in darkness to celebrate the resurrection. Traditionally, it includes kindling of new fire and lighting of a special large candle, the **paschal candle**, singing of the ancient **Exsultet**
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(‘Rejoice, heavenly powers’), reading of nine lessons (mostly from the Old Testament), blessing of water for baptism or renewing of baptismal vows or both, and celebrating the Easter Eucharist.

In ancient times, Easter Week was devoted to instruction of the newly baptized about the meaning of the sacraments, the so-called mystagogical catechesis. Fourth-century collections of these catechetical lectures survive, attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. These lectures are very important documents for recovering both the practices of various Christian centers and the differing interpretations they give to the sacraments. On the Sunday following Easter, the new Christians donned their white robes as fully initiated and instructed members of the Body of Christ.

Second in importance in early centuries was the celebration of another event, the Day of Pentecost. Like the Pascha, it was also a Jewish feast: “You shall count until the day after the seventh Sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord” (Lev. 23:16). Sometime during the first century A.D., the Day of Pentecost came to reflect, for Jews, the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. Paul contrasts this with the giving of the Spirit: “Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory... how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?” (2 Cor. 3:7-8). For Christians, the Day of Pentecost commemorated the birthday of the Church when, with the noise of a wind, tongues of flame rested on the disciples and they began to talk in other tongues (Acts 2:1-41). The book of Acts is a chronicle of the work of the Spirit-filled church in its earliest years.

The Day of Pentecost began as a unitive feast, too, originally including commemoration of the Ascension. Tertullian suggests that Christ had ascended into heaven at Pentecost. And in the first half of the fourth century Eusebius speaks of “the august and holy solemnity of Pentecost [that is, the fifty days], which is distinguished by a period of seven weeks, and sealed with that one day on which the Holy Scriptures attest the ascension of our common Savior into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit.” In other words, for almost four centuries, the Day of Pentecost commemorated both the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. By the end of the fourth century, these two commemorations had been separated. The Apostolic Constitutions describes forty days after Easter as the proper time to “celebrate the feast of the ascension of the Lord.” Once again, the biblical witness has been historized by being interpreted as a means of dating past events in time. In this case, Acts 1:3 and its mention of the “forty days” during which Jesus taught his disciples seems to have been the source of pinpointing the date of the ascension. Where there had previously been one feast, by the late-fourth century there were two: Ascension Day and the Day of Pentecost. Christ was in heaven and the Holy Spirit dwelled in the holy church on earth. It was a daily reality the church could experience, not an abstraction.

The third chief event in the calendar by the fourth century was Epiphany. Its origins are obscure; they were not Jewish but maybe Egyptian. The date may relate to the belief that Jesus was conceived on the date of his death, sometimes believed to be April 6, placing his birth on January 6. The Epiphany signified several things, all of which had to do with the beginnings of Jesus Christ’s work of manifesting God. This feast referred to the birth of Christ (with which two Gospels begin), the Magi (in the West), to the baptism of Jesus (with which the other Gospels begin), and to the first miracle of which John’s Gospel says: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” The common theme of all these events is Jesus Christ manifesting God to humans. Appropriately, the early church often called this day “The Theophany” (manifestation of God) and some Eastern Orthodox churches still do. The prologue to the Fourth Gospel sets the theme: “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (1:18). Apparently, in some churches January 6 marked the beginning of the church year, symbolized by beginning the reading of one of the Gospels on this date.

Epiphany underwent a split, probably beginning in Rome, during the first half of the fourth century. Our earliest mention (except among Donatist schismatics) of the new feast, Christmas, occurs in a Roman document from A.D. 354 that reflects usage of the feast about A.D. 336. It lists December 25 as “natus Christus in Betlehem Iudaeae.” This date competed with a relatively new pagan festival of the Unconquered Sun as the sun begins to wax again at the winter
solstice. (By the fourth century A.D., the Julian calendar was off by four days.) Gradually, the new festival of Christmas took over part of the commemorations of the Epiphany. Chrysostom told a congregation in Antioch on Christmas Day, A.D. 386: “This day . . . [which] has now been brought to us, not many years ago, has developed so quickly and borne such fruit.”20 The following Epiphany Day he explained: “For this is the day on which he was baptized, and made holy the nature of the waters. . . . Why then is this day called Epiphany? Because it was not when he was born that he became manifest to all, but when he was baptized; for up to this day he was unknown to the multitudes.”21

The Epiphany, then, is older than Christmas and has a deeper meaning. For instead of simply being an anniversary of the birth of Christ, it testifies to the whole purpose of the incarnation: the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, beginning both with his birth and with the beginning of his ministry (the baptism when he is proclaimed “My Son, the Beloved”). And the mighty signs and teachings, narrated in the Gospels as Jesus accomplished this manifestation, provide an opportunity in the Season after Epiphany (or Ordinary Time) for commemoration of those works and teachings of Jesus that led up to the final events in Jerusalem.

A council in Spain in A.D. 380 decreed that “From December 17 until the day of Epiphany which is January 6 no one is permitted to be absent from Church.”22 This is a precedent for the season of Advent at a time when Christmas itself was still unknown in Spain. By the fifth century, a forty-day season of preparation for the Epiphany was being practiced in parts of Gaul. (This paralleled Lent and began about when Advent now begins.) Rome eventually adopted a four-week Advent before Christmas.

A process similar to that which had splintered the Pascha into a series of commemorations also operated with Christmas. As a Jewish boy, Jesus would likely have been circumcised and named on the eighth day after his birth. Luke tells us: “After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus” (2:21). Accordingly, the commemoration on January 1 became known as the Feast of the Circumcision or the Name of Jesus. Roman Catholics now keep this as the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Luke 2:22-40 gives the story of the Presentation in

the Temple (or Purification or Candlemas), an event which would have occurred February 2, forty days after his birth. It was discerned that the Annunciation mentioned in Luke 1:26-38 would have happened nine months before Christmas or March 25. Elizabeth was then six months pregnant and Mary’s subsequent Visitation to Elizabeth (recorded in verses 39-56) was fixed at May 31 or just before the birth of John the Baptist, identified as June 24 (three months after the Annunciation). John’s birth came at the summer solstice when the sun wanes until the birth of Christ: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). All these developments are combinations of Luke 1 and 2 and obstetrics.

The Christian year, especially the temporal cycle (movable dates and the Christmas cycle), was basically complete by the end of the fourth century. The subsequent history is that of the development of the sanctoral cycle (those fixed dates commemorating the deaths of saints aside from dates based on Christmas). These dates began early; the “Martyrdom of Polycarp” mentions commemoration of a second-century martyr. Basically such observances were commemorations of local heroes and heroines of the faith. Tertullian tells us, “As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honors.”23 After all, one’s birth into eternity (death) was far more important than his or her birth into time. The temporal cycle became increasingly obscured with commemorations of saints, especially after relics of saints began to be moved from place to place. The list of days of local saints was eventually supplemented with names of saints from other regions.

Few significant additions occurred after the fourth century. Trinity Sunday, the Sunday after the Day of Pentecost, was introduced about A.D. 1000. Unlike other feasts, it represents a theological doctrine unrelated to a historical event. In the West the ninth century saw the designation of November 1 as All Saints Day. It had earlier springtime precedents, but the Gallican placement of it in the harvest season was accepted by Rome about A.D. 835. By then, too, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was kept throughout the West on August 15. In the thirteenth century, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday began to be observed as Corpus Christi. Later Roman Catholic developments were the mandatory observance of the Immaculate Conception on December 8.
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(eighteenth century), the Sacred Heart (nineteenth century), and Christ the King (twentieth century).

Let us recapitulate. John Chrysostom, in a sermon preached in A.D. 386, effectively sums up the liturgical year:

For if Christ had not been born into flesh, he would not have been baptized, which is the Theophany [Epiphany], he would not have been crucified [some texts add: and risen] which is the Pascha, he would not have sent down the spirit, which is the Pentecost.24

In the fourth century, the three great primitive feasts—the Epiphany, the Pascha, and the Day of Pentecost—had seen a split from these feasts of related days: Christmas, Good Friday, and Ascension, along with lesser days.

Gregory Dix interpreted these developments as a sign that the fourth-century church was becoming “reconciled to time” and was losing its fervent expectation of the end of time.25 But this reconciliation to time was inevitable. People want to know, to visualize, to experience for themselves; this is a very normal human desire. Worship builds on our humanity. So what happened in the fourth century was that the church developed a more dramatic way of expressing the central realities Christians experienced—manifestation, resurrection, and the indwelling Spirit. Eschatological fervor had slackened long before the peace of the church under Constantine. But the imagination of Christians directed backward in time was no less fruitful and intensified their perception of the incarnation. The success of these fourth-century innovations is shown by their vivid presence among us today. Obviously they have rung true to both Christian faith and human experience.

All in all, the church year is a very satisfactory reflection of the life and faith of the early church and has remained in use with little change ever since. Modern efforts to systematize and tidy it up have never been very satisfactory. Granted the ancient church year leaves large gaps in time, especially after the Day of Pentecost. But its strength lies in its firm grasp of the core of the Christian experience and in its ability to reflect in a vivid way that Christ has made God manifest, that Christ has risen from the dead, and that Christ sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in the holy church.

The sixteenth-century reformers took various approaches to the calendar. Martin Luther (1483–1546) eliminated saints’ days by seeking “to celebrate only on Lord’s Days and on Festivals of the Lord, abrogating completely the festivals of all the saints. . . . We regard the festivals of the Purification [Presentation] and of the Annunciation as festivals of Christ, like the Epiphany and the Circumcision.”26 From the sanctoral cycle in its Book of Common Prayer (hereafter BCP), the Church of England retained proper to commemorate only those saints mentioned in the Bible and All Saints Day.

The Church of Scotland was more radical. Its 1560 Book of Discipline condemned all “feasts [as they term them] of apostles, martyrs, virgins, of Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our Lady. Which things, because in God’s scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge utterly to be abolished from this realm; affirming further, that the obstinate maintainers and teachers of such abominations ought not to escape the punishment of the civil magistrate.”27 Eighty-five years later the Westminster Directory echoed the same sentiment, “Festival days, vulgarly called Holy Days, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued.”28 It did, however, urge days of “Public solemn fasting” or “of Public Thanksgiving” according as God’s actions in present times indicated favor or judgment.

John Wesley, (1703–1791) always the pragmatist, abolished “most of the holy-days . . . as at present answering no valuable end.”29 His calendar included the four Sundays of Advent, Christmas Day, up to fifteen Sundays after Christmas, the Sunday before Easter, Good Friday, Easter Day, five Sundays after Easter, Ascension Day, Sunday after Ascension Day, Whitsunday, Trinity Sunday, and up to twenty-five Sundays after Trinity. Wesley’s journals reveal a personal fondness for All Saints Day. Both Wesley’s calendar and lections were soon lost among American Methodists.

Renewed interest in the church year among American Protestants occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, a period in which aesthetic approaches to worship tended to increase. An effort to rearrange the year was advanced in the form of a new season, Kingdomtide. It seems to have been promoted largely by Professor Fred Winslow Adams of Boston University School of Theology.
Kingdomtide originally appeared in a Federal Council of Churches publication, The Christian Year, published in 1937 and 1940. The first edition suggested observing Kingdomtide for the last six months of the church year; in 1940 this time was divided between Whitsuntide and Kingdomtide.³⁰ Today, United Methodists have the options of observing part of this time as Kingdomtide or entirely as the Season after Pentecost. A somewhat similar experiment was briefly tried by American Presbyterians. They experimented with a suggestion made in 1956 by Allan McArthur, a Scottish pastor, of having a season of “God the Father” in the fall.³¹ After four years of trial use, this was abandoned.

Since Vatican II, a profound new interest in the calendar has emerged and a deep new appreciation has developed around how our lives as Christians are shaped and reflected by the way we keep time. The first landmark was the new Roman Calendar which went into effect among Roman Catholics on November 30, 1969, the first day of the liturgical year 1970. It is the fruit of the most careful review ever attempted of how Christians use time. Most of the new Roman Catholic reforms have since been adopted or adapted by major Protestant bodies in many parts of the world.

The most radical Roman Catholic change, that of treating the weeks after the Epiphany and those after the Day of Pentecost not as distinct seasons but only as parts of the “Season of the year” (per annum) or Ordinary Time, has not been adopted by most Protestants. Certainly, it is a realistic approach to those seasons having little distinctive character. Other changes, however, have been widely accepted, such as keeping the Sunday after the Epiphany as the Baptism of the Lord or the last Sunday of the church year as Christ the King or Reign of Christ. The Lutheran practice of commemorating the Sunday before Ash Wednesday as Sunday of the Transfiguration of the Lord has been adopted by many churches. (Roman Catholics have observed this on August 6 since the fifteenth century.)

For the first time in four hundred years, an ecumenical calendar is being followed by Protestants and Roman Catholics around the world. There is basic agreement on most of the greatest feast days, which Roman Catholics now call solemnities; less common observance of the subsidiary feasts, and still less of memorials or saints’ days. The newest calendar is the result of a careful attempt to recapture the structure and meaning of the oldest calendar, the one filled out in the fourth century. The new calendar provides a strong witness to the priorities of Christian faith, just as the oldest Christian calendars did.

**Theology from the Christian Year**

How the church kept time in early centuries has been discussed in detail because, as so often happens in Christian worship, if we understand the experiences of the church’s first four centuries, we have gained the heart of the matter. It will be worthwhile, though, to reflect a bit on the meaning of this.

The calendar of the early church centered upon what God had done and continued to do through the Holy Spirit. The point of the Christian year is that all is done for us. All we have to do is accept what God has done. Then we really are free to act. The church’s liturgical year both underscores the futility of our efforts and exults in God’s victories for us. In short, the church year is a constant reminder of gifts that we cannot create but can only accept. Pius Parsch called it “the church’s year of grace.”³² Throughout the year, the various seasons and days remind us that salvation is a gift offered to us in all its different aspects. The Christian year can help us sort out for ourselves our real priorities. Keeping time with the rhythms of the early church can be an important means of doing this.

In briefest terms, the church’s year of grace functions to proclaim Jesus Christ until he comes again and to testify to the Holy Spirit indwelling the church in the meantime. The church year is both proclamation and thanksgiving. In much the same way as Jewish and Christian prayer recites what we give thanks for, so the Christian year proclaims and thanks God for God’s marvelous actions. Christians and Jews praise God, not in abstract terms, but by reciting the marvelous works of God. It is a think/thank process by which we glorify God through recalling what God has done. The liturgical year reflects the very nature of Christian prayer and our relationship to God. Much of its power, as is true of daily prayer, comes through reiteration. Year after year, week after week, hour
after hour, the acts of God are commemorated and our apprehen-
sion of them deepened. These cycles save us from a shallow spiri-
tuality, based on ourselves, by pointing us to God’s works instead.

Keeping time, of course, can also become an idolatrous gimmick
like anything else that is good. Time can be used simply to dress up
our services and to make them look fashionable. Keeping the
church year for the wrong reasons is worse than useless for we can
end up worshipping our own gimmicks rather than God. But when
we do use the structures of time to bring us closer to God, they can
serve that purpose exceedingly well by helping us to encounter the
wholeness of the gospel.

How does time bring us closer to God? The Christian year is a
means by which we relive for ourselves all that matters of salvation
history. When we recall the past events of salvation, they come
alive in our present power to save. Our acts of remembrance bring
the original events back to us with all their meaning. And so we
continue to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor.
11:26). The various acts of rehearsing salvation history give us
new the benefits of what God has done for us in these past events.
Christ’s birth, baptism, death, resurrection, and so on are all given
to us again for our own appropriation through corporate reenact-
ment of them. These events become no longer simply detached
data from the past but part of our own personal history as we relive
salvation history by rehearsing it in our worship. Thus Christ dies
again in our consciousness every Good Friday. And every Easter
and every Lord’s Day we are witnesses to the resurrection.

The Christian year becomes a vital and refreshing means
through which God is given to us. It is a giving that is never
exhausted. Each time, the year, week, and day push us a bit deeper
into our encounter with God. We perceive one aspect of Christ’s
being baptized this year, another next year, but we never touch bot-
tom. So the liturgical year is a constant means of grace through
which we receive God’s gifts to us.

The year of grace is about what God does for us, not our efforts.
The whole structure calls attention to God’s work, not ours. And
God’s work is made known in differing ways through the chang-
ing events and needs of every time and place in which Christians
worship.

The Season of Advent is both a time of thanks for the gift of
Christ to us in past time and a time for anticipation of his second
coming. It contains both threat and promise. Christmas Day
rehearses God’s self-giving in the birth of Jesus Christ. The Season
of Christmas continues this commemoration through the
Epiphany.

In the Season of Epiphany (or Ordinary Time), the appointed
Gospels stress the various ways in which Jesus Christ has made
God manifest to us by making the Father known through mighty
signs and teachings. These begin with the Baptism of the Lord
(when Jesus’ Sonship is declared and his ministry begins). The
Sundays after Epiphany continue with readings about the signs
and teachings by which Jesus made his glory known through mani-
ifesting God. The season ends with the Last Sunday after Epiphany
or Transfiguration Sunday in which Jesus is once again pro-
claimed: “My Son, the Beloved.”

The Season of Lent is the season in which we participate in that
final trip to Jerusalem and the self-giving nature of love shown in
Christ’s passion and death. All is changed as Christ gives himself
to us as the resurrected one at Easter. The Season of Easter begins
with Easter Vigil and concludes on the Day of Pentecost.
Ascension of the Lord commemorates the ending of Christ’s histo-
rical visibility and the beginning of his sacramental visibility.

The Season after Pentecost (or Ordinary Time or Kingdomtide)
signals the long interim of the new covenant church until Christ
comes in glory. Both the Old Testament and the New remind us of
God’s continuing saving works. The Last Sunday after Pentecost,
Reign of Christ or Christ the King, pushes us to anticipate the con-
summation of all things when Christ comes in glory as King of all,
and all human failures and achievements are, at last, made of no
account, a most comforting doctrine. Then, the following week, we
are once again into the Season of Advent, and the year starts over
afresh.

The minor christological feasts have evangelical values that we
are just beginning to discover. The Name of Jesus, Presentation,
Annunciation, and Visitation are christological and call attention to
Christ’s full humanity and identification with human social pat-
terns. All Saints Day is christological, too. It does not dwell on the
virtues of the saints but on the love of Christ who works in people throughout time to accomplish God’s purposes. The chief benefit of commemorating the saints is the recognition through them of Christ, who never leaves us without a witness. If commemoration of individual saints could help us realize this, then such piety could once again serve a “valuable end.”

In actual parish life, the Christian year is only one of many calendars by which congregations live. There are various national calendars, which add events often deserving commemoration in churches. In the British Isles, such dates as Mothering Sunday, Harvest Festival, or Remembrance Sunday are usually recognized in prayers and hymns. Rarely in the United States do Mother’s Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving Day go unrecognized. Ethnic groups keep their identity through other festivals (St. Patrick’s Day and Dyngus Day). Church life is also affected by the academic year which also governs the vacation plans of parents. And the financial year is a fact of church life that can hardly be ignored.

More directly, local churches usually evolve their own pragmatic calendar, which gives a necessary structure to congregational life. An annual event for many country churches is Homecoming Sunday in which former residents return for worship and a meal on the grounds, often in the vicinity of the graveyard where relatives are buried. More common is the annual revival, a week of preaching services that often ends with the eucharist. Rally Day marks the beginning of the Sunday school year; Loyalty Sunday calls for pledges of money to support the congregation’s ministry; and the Christmas pageant is an annual event involving all generations. Frequently, Sundays are set aside to raise funds for various charities or to promote good causes. Many Protestant churches keep the first Sunday of October as World Communion Sunday.

All of these are significant events in the life of local congregations. They do, indeed, call more attention to human activity than to God’s actions, but they accent aspects of the congregation’s ministry to the world. The pragmatic calendar with its focus on ourselves always needs the balance of the traditional Christian year, which points beyond us to God’s work for us. Ultimately that is what makes our work for others possible.
is to revel in the rich variety inherent in the Christian year. And the best way to ensure dullness is to ignore such a varied array of possibilities.

Nothing is a better source for variety and interest in Christian worship than careful following of the Christian year. The structure of the year provides an orderly pegboard on which to hang all our best ideas and is a stimulus for creativity. The first question to raise when planning any service is, When does it occur in the Christian year? The answer should be our first and best clue to guiding our planning.

The calendar, we have said, is the foundation of most Christian worship. The calendar in diagram 6 is that of the Revised Common Lectionary of 1992. The reader will probably want to refer to it frequently while reading the following explanations.

The calendar is based on two cycles: one culminating in the resurrection at Easter Day and the other focusing on the incarnation on Christmas Day. The seasons of Advent and Lent serve as times of preparation and expectancy; the seasons of Christmas and Easter rejoice in the events they commemorate. The Season of Epiphany and the Season after Pentecost have less distinct meaning and function as Ordinary Time.

A few details are necessary in keeping time with the church. The number of Sundays in the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter are constants. There are either one or two Sundays in the Season of Christmas. The number of Sundays after Epiphany or Pentecost (Ordinary Time) varies and different churches have varying means of choosing the lections for these. For most North American Protestants, the final Sunday of the post-Epiphany season (just before Ash Wednesday) is always the last Sunday after the Epiphany (Transfiguration Sunday). These churches and Roman Catholics keep the Sunday before Advent as Reign of Christ or Christ the King (last Sunday after Pentecost).

It may help to remember that, as far as Sundays and festivals are concerned, each season except Advent begins and ends with a special day. The Season of Christmas extends from Christmas to the Epiphany, the Season of Epiphany from Epiphany through Transfiguration Sunday, the Season of Lent from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, the Season of Easter from Easter Vigil and

**SUNDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS**

**SEASON OF ADVENT**
First Sunday of Advent to Fourth Sunday of Advent

**SEASON OF CHRISTMAS**
Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day)
First Sunday after Christmas
New Year's Day
Second Sunday after Christmas

**SEASON OF EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)**
Epiphany of the Lord
First Sunday after the Epiphany (Baptism of the Lord)
Second Sunday after the Epiphany to Ninth Sunday after the Epiphany
Last Sunday after the Epiphany (Transfiguration Sunday)

**SEASON OF LENT**
Ash Wednesday
First Sunday in Lent to Sixth Sunday in Lent
(Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday)
Holy Week
Monday of Holy Week
Tuesday of Holy Week
Wednesday of Holy Week
Holy Thursday
Good Friday
Holy Saturday

**SEASON OF EASTER**
Resurrection of the Lord
Easter Vigil
Easter Day
Second Sunday of Easter to Sixth Sunday of Easter
Ascension of the Lord
(Sixth Thursday of Easter)
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Day of Pentecost

**SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)**
Trinity Sunday (First Sunday after Pentecost)
Second through Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Reign of Christ or Christ the King (Last Sunday after Pentecost)

**SPECIAL DAYS**
Presentation of the Lord (February 2)
Annunciation of the Lord (March 25)
Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (May 31)
Holy Cross (September 14)
All Saints (November 1)
Thanksgiving Day (Fourth Thursday of November, U.S.; Second Monday of October, Canada)
Day through the Day of Pentecost, and the Season after Pentecost from Trinity Sunday through Reign of Christ or Christ the King. White vestments and hangings are usually used on all these special days except Ash Wednesday, Holy Saturday, and the Day of Pentecost.

A few dates may be unfamiliar or have special problems. In various churches, Epiphany Day may be celebrated on the first Sunday of January, combined with the first Sunday after Christmas, or observed with the Baptism of the Lord. The **Baptism of the Lord** is a new festival for Western Christians though closely associated with Epiphany. Baptism of the Lord comes on the first Sunday after January 6 (the Epiphany).

Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday is now regarded as a single day on which the passion narrative is usually read. The Easter Vigil is usually celebrated on the Eve before Easter Day. Ascension Day is sometimes commemorated on the seventh Sunday of Easter. The Day of Pentecost has recovered its earlier place as the fiftieth day and the last Sunday of the Season of Easter. All Saints Day, in some churches, may be observed on the first Sunday of November when November 1 is not a Sunday. The last Sunday of October, once observed as Reformation Sunday, has now been dropped by many churches. Instead, it now seems more appropriate to commemorate our common inheritance with All Saints Day.

For those who keep the minor christological feasts, there are other possibilities. The color for each is usually white. The **Holy Name of Jesus** (January 1) calls to mind Jesus’ humanity and his full identification with human society (cf. Luke 2:15-21). **Presentation of the Lord** (February 2) was traditionally called Purification or Candlemas since the candles to be used each year were blessed on this occasion. It can also call attention to the aged in our society who, Luke tells us, were the first to proclaim the Lord (Anna and Simeon) (cf. Luke 2:22-40). **Annunciation of the Lord**—Lady Day in some countries (March 25)—calls attention to the power of the humblest person to fulfill God’s will (cf. Luke 1:25-38). **Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth** (May 31), with its dialogue between two women, calls attention to the incarnation and contains Mary’s Song, the radical *Magnificat*—in essence the social creed of Christianity (cf. Luke 1:39-56). **Holy Cross** (September 14) focuses on the sacrifice of Christ.

Roman Catholics also keep other additional **solemnities**: Mary, Mother of God (January 1); Joseph, Husband of Mary (March 19); Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart, Birth of John the Baptist (June 24); Peter and Paul, Apostles (June 29) Assumption of Mary (August 15); and Immaculate Conception (December 8). The course of the normal Sunday readings ought rarely to be broken for special observances without good reason since the lessons are usually constructed to cover scripture in a comprehensive way.

If the calendar is the foundation of Christian worship, the first floor is certainly the **lectionary** or list of **lections** (scripture lessons) based on the Christian year. One of the most significant changes in Protestant worship in recent decades has been the widespread adoption of a lectionary. The use of it in worship as the basis of preaching has affected the worship of thousands of congregations. All too often, earlier, haphazard methods of choosing scripture had, in fact, eliminated extensive portions of God’s word and reshaped scripture in the preacher’s own image. Social activists might be partial to passages from the prophetic books and conservatives to the more rigid passages in the pastoral epistles. Yet both, in choosing passages they found congenial, were in effect rewriting scripture. Liberals and conservatives were equally guilty of revising God’s word in accord with personal preferences.

One of the most useful outcomes of the post-Vatican II era has been an ecumenical lectionary. Begun after Vatican II by the Roman Catholic Church, several years’ work by a full-time staff and eight hundred consultants—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—brought it to its present form. Published as *The Lectionary for Mass*, for Roman Catholics, it is the most carefully prepared lectionary in all Christian history. The *Common Lectionary* was published in 1983 and replaced in 1992 by the *Revised Common Lectionary*. It is now in use in English-speaking Protestant churches around the world. The most distinctive feature is in permitting long Old Testament narratives to unfold, week by week, during the Season after Pentecost.

How do the new lectionaries work? Both are three-year lectionaries, the years are designated A, B, and C. Year C is a year, such as 2001, that is evenly divisible by the number 3. The church year begins between November 27 and December 3 of the
An opening prayer is sometimes an effective way to articulate the general thrust of the lessons for the day and to alert the congregation to the event. The Roman Catholic Sacramentary provides opening prayers (and alternatives) for Sundays and special occasions. Episcopalians and Anglicans retain the ancient term “collect” for opening prayers, and Episcopalians provide them in “traditional” and “contemporary” language. “Prayer of the Day” is the Lutheran term, “Opening Prayer” the United Methodist, and “Prayer of the Day” or “Opening Prayer” the Presbyterian.

Psalms are used in worship as responses to or commentaries on the lessons. The Roman Catholic and the Revised Common lectionaries provide lists of psalms chosen deliberately to relate to the lessons in the lectionary. A psalm serves as a response not as a lesson, but it does relate carefully to the lessons.

Appropriate hymns are listed in almost all denominational hymnals for seasons, festivals, and special occasions. Most hymnals have scriptural indexes as well as topical ones.

No one has questioned that J. S. Bach wrote some of the greatest choral and instrumental music while following the careful guidance of the lectionary and calendar. When well planned, choral music can mesh successfully with the ministry of the word by providing a musical commentary on the lessons. Too often, anthems with texts unrelated to the occasion blunder into the otherwise carefully planned flow of a service. This is not necessary. Careful use of the calendar and lectionary can be a tremendous boon to church musicians since it gives them lead time to order and rehearse appropriate music.

Nothing is as thoroughly and obviously affected by the lessons as the sermon. There are several direct results from the widespread use of the lectionary. First, it has made financially feasible the publication of a number of top-quality aids to biblical study in the form of commentaries and other resources to improve homiletic use of the Bible. Second, the lectionary has forced many preachers to preach on a much wider selection of scripture than most did previously. That does not mean that one should preach on all three lessons at one time. Sometimes they relate to one another well; more often than not the second lesson goes its own separate way. But to preach on any one of these texts will force the preacher to study...
and ponder many portions of God's word that are unfamiliar. Third, anyone who really follows the year and the lessons carefully finds himself or herself probing deeper into Christology. One simply cannot preach on the Baptism of the Lord, the Transfiguration, Passion or Palm Sunday, Ascension Day, All Saints Day, Christ the King, and so on, without being forced to make up one's mind about whom one says Jesus Christ is. Without such discipline, it is remarkable how long a person can jump around that vital question. Many preachers have agreed that preaching from the lectionary improves the content of their sermons. And many have been surprised at how relevant assigned passages often are for their congregation's time and place.

Finally, we must say a word on the visuals that can be derived from the lectionary and calendar. They, too, provide ordinary and proper components of worship, though of a different type from verbal texts. With the use of textiles, graphics, and other visuals we can have, in effect, a new church setting each Sunday just as the whole appearance of a living room is changed by adding some orange pillows on the sofa. For example, where projections are possible, a wall can be whatever we want to project on it. We are limited only by the horizons of our imagination.

Some of the things we have learned about worship in the last few years seem irrevocable. In 1965 few, if any, churches had ever used a banner. By now, most have. If the Gospel can be proclaimed visually, why should it not be? Each new dimension we add to our perception of the Good News seems to be clear gain.

How do we do it? The simplest concept is just using pure color. Colors signify different meanings in various cultures, and we must recognize this. Color helps form general expectations for any occasion. We do not wear flamboyant colors to a funeral. Traditionally, purples, grays, and blues have been used for seasons of a penitential character, such as Advent and Lent, although any dark colors could be used. White has been used for events or seasons with strong christological meaning, such as the Baptism of the Lord or the Season of Easter; yellows and golds are also possibilities at such times. Red has been reserved for occasions relating to the Holy Spirit (such as the Day of Pentecost or ordinations) or to commemorations of martyrs. Green has been used for seasons of less pro-

nounced character or Ordinary Time such as the Season of Epiphany or the Season after Pentecost. These longer seasons need not stagnate in a single color or hue any more than nature retains a monotonous green. After all, nature is not static. The delicate yellow greens of spring progress to the deeper hues of summer and then to the bright yellows and reds of autumn. The absence of any colored textiles from Maundy Thursday to the Easter Vigil is a striking use of contrast. Contrast itself is one of the prime forms of communication in visual materials. Different cultures have different concepts of the meaning of colors.

Much may be done with pure color. However, we are coming to realize the need to be equally sensitive to hues and textures. A silk purple might be less preferable for Lent than a rough-textured blue or gray. And a splendid, tightly woven gold might be better for Easter than a coarse white material.

Colors and textures can be used most effectively in textiles for hangings on pulpits, on lecterns (if any), for the stoles worn by ordained ministers, or for ministerial vestments. Sometimes bolts of colored cloth may simply be hung as giant abstract banners. It is better not to hide the altar-table under cloth hangings.

Banners can be hung almost anywhere in the church. Increasingly we see a move to large-scale banners, fifteen feet in length or so. They ought to be changed as the year turns. The church building at Easter ought to be quite different from what it is in Lent.

Posters, bulletins, placards, and other graphics can express the gospel in forceful ways. Photographs may be blown up cheaply. A few words of press type—"Lord, when was it that we saw you?" (Matt. 25:37) or "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" (Lam. 1:12)—lettered on photos can be a powerful message. Try to discover a few key words for any occasion—"Peace on earth," "My Son," "He is risen"—and use them. Visit a local art supply store to see how many possibilities churches have neglected. Good posters and bulletins will not soon be forgotten, especially when created locally.

Certain objects—such as an advent wreath with four candles, a lenten veil, palm branches, and a paschal candle (during the Season of Easter)—communicate to the congregation at different
seasons. Symbols pertain to different occasions too: a star, a crown of thorns, tongues of flame, and so on. The lack of objects also is a powerful form of communication. The absence of any flowers and candles during Holy Week can say much.

A word of caution is necessary. None of these colors, textures, images, or objects is a decoration or an ornament. If they are used as such, they are trivialities not worth the time or effort they consume. But if used to add one more dimension to our perception of the Good News, they can be well worth considerable effort and expense. Much work goes into a sermon, meant to be preached only once. Work from a broader segment of the community on visuals to present the gospel is a good plan even though visuals, like the sermon itself, may be used only once.

All in all, Christians are called to proclaim the gospel by every means available. The Christian year and the lectionary based on it are two vital resources for this. If keeping time with the church can make for better Christians, then exploring all the possibilities such a discipline can offer is most worthwhile.

The same is true for the rest of salvation history. The Jewish and Christian God is made known by events that occur among men and women, not on Mt. Olympus or in Valhalla. It is space on earth that is made holy, not because of the place itself but because of what God does for humans in that place. In the Bible, saving events usually happen at some ordinary field, well, or village street. Today such places would be as ordinary as a shopping mall. The location is indifferent, the event is crucial.

Of course, after the event, the place becomes significant as a bearer of meaning: the place where something happened. Jacob had a dream at a remote place and woke to exclaim that it was a fearsome place, the house of God, the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17). His dream provoked him to erect a pillar and give the place a new name, “House of God,” that all might know about the event. We have already seen how fourth-century Jerusalem shaped all subsequent Christian worship by commemorations at the times and places where climactic events in Christ’s life and death occurred. Fourth century pilgrims to Jerusalem were still shown the sycamore tree Zacchaeus had climbed to see Jesus—once an