

# Exploring the One Year Lectionary

Rev. Randy Asburry

Presented at

“Sing to the Lord a New Song: Institute on Liturgy, Preaching, and Church Music”

July 22-25, 2008

Concordia University Nebraska, Seward, NE

*Brochure summary: Why preach from a lectionary that repeats itself every year? Because repetition is the mother of learning and living God’s mercy in Christ Jesus. For centuries an annual cycle of readings nourished the church’s liturgical life, and Lutheran Service Book includes a conservative revision of that lectionary. This workshop will explore the shape of the One-Year Lectionary, the benefits of using it, and resources to help the preacher.*

✘      ✘      ✘      ✘      ✘

The Lord be with you. *And with your Spirit (And also with you).* Let us pray.  
**Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom which comes down from heaven that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve You and in the confession of Your name may abide to the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**  
(Collect for the Word, *LW*, 262).

“Preach you the Word and plant it home / To men who like or like it not” (*LW* 259:1). Martin Franzmann penned these great words to an ordination hymn. That exhortation to pastors also applies to the One-Year Lectionary. Today, I will make the case that preaching the One-Year Lectionary is actually the best way to plant home the Word Who is Christ Jesus our Lord, whether men like or like it not.

This morning we’ll address the question of why – why would a preacher want to preach the One-Year Lectionary. Then we’ll spend most of our time on walking through the Church Year by way of the One-Year Lectionary. We’ll see the shape of the Church Year, and then how the One-Year Series gives us very strong content for shaping and feeding us in the Faith. And finally, I’ll offer some resources that I find helpful.

Let me begin with a lighthearted email I received a few years back. One pastor asked for reasons, tips, and words of wisdom as he contemplated switching from the Three-Year Series to the One-Year Lectionary. Another pastor responded by saying that he had made the switch, and then he gave a “Top Ten List” for sticking with the One-Year. Here’s his “Top Ten List,” slightly revised:

10. You can always find a Luther sermon on that text, as well as some other nice resources.
  9. For the sake of the children (both young and old), we have a common repertoire of Bible readings from which to draw in times of need, for Catechesis, and for support when challenged in our beliefs.
  8. I enjoy the challenge of keeping a text “fresh” for preaching from year to year.
  7. It’s easier to prepare something that you prepared just a year ago rather than dusting off what you prepared from three years ago.
  6. It gave me the opportunity to move away from the “flower & fields” bulletin covers.
  5. It gave me the opportunity to move away from the NIV since CPH does not print out the One-Year readings.
  4. It gives a reason for the rose colored candle during Advent.
  3. You can confuse the pastors in your Circuit by celebrating the Transfiguration three weeks before they do.
  2. Your fellow pastors will consider you an anachronism when they find out.
- And the number 1 reason for preaching the One-Year Lectionary is (drum roll, please):
1. You get to show off your learning by saying words like “Septuagesima,” “Sexagesima,” and “Quinquagesima.”

I thought that email summed things up quite well. So, we’ll come back to some of these “Top Ten” points as we go along this morning.

## WHY PREACH THE ONE-YEAR LECTIONARY?

Before getting into the joys and details of preaching the One-Year Lectionary, let’s address the question “Why?” Why would a pastor *want* to preach the One-Year Lectionary when everything seems to be geared to the Three-Year? Why would a pastor *want* to preach on the same readings year after year after year? Good questions. **The first answer and reason for preaching the One-Year Lectionary is precisely the repetition.** Remember #9 from our “Top Ten List”: “We have a common repertoire of Bible readings from which to draw in times of need, for Catechesis, and for support when challenged in our beliefs.”

First, in the interest of full-disclosure, let me say that I too thought the One-Year Lectionary, especially as I first saw it in *Lutheran Worship*, was, well, an oddity. Hey, I was used to the Three-Year Lectionary. I had learned it back home, and when I was ordained I thought it would provide so much variety for preaching. I mean, you could preach on the Gospels for one three-year cycle, on the Epistles for the next three years, and on the Old Testament for the third three-year cycle. Wow! Nine years before you’d have to repeat yourself! Well, I used to think it would be great.

So I used the Three-Year Lectionary for my first five years in the pulpit. Then, on the First Sunday in Advent, 1995, and after several months of careful thought and planning, I switched to the *Lutheran Worship* One-Year Series. Even though I could no longer “be on the same page” in my weekly pericope study with two brother pastors, it was one of the best things I did. What led me to switch?

I wanted to have **the repetition of readings** from year to year. After all, *repetitio mater studiorum est*, “repetition is the mother of learning.” I had learned in a couple of conferences on worship and preaching that the One-Year Series was more thematic. I discovered that it would concentrate on the life of Jesus and the life of the Church more than on marching through selected books of the Bible. The chief reason in my mind, back in late 1995, was something that Dr. Kenneth Korby had said in a different context. He used the Latin phrase *non multa, sed multum* – literally, “not many things, but much.” We could even say, “Not quantity, but quality.”

When I applied this to the lectionary of readings and to my preaching, it seemed to clear away a lot of mental fog. My people did not necessarily need greater numbers of readings in order to learn the Scriptures and the Christian faith and life. But they would benefit from “much,” that is, from learning certain key passages over and over and in more and more depth. I realized that learning and growing in the faith is not foremost a matter of how many Bible passages you can learn (or memorize) – after all, even Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons can learn lots of Scripture too – but rather it’s a matter of learning key passages and learning them well. And when our people learn key passages well, they can correctly read and learn the rest of Scripture. When you learn key passages well, you can draw upon them in time of need because they have become part of you, if you will. You have great resources, again learned well, during times when your faith is challenged. And let’s not forget the great benefit in Catechesis for youngsters and those new to the faith. Learning certain Bible passages well and repeatedly helps catechumens to learn and grow in the Faith once delivered to the saints.

Don’t get me wrong! I’m not opposed to learning more and more Scripture. I’m certainly not trying to minimize the importance of Holy Scripture for our worship life, for the life of the Church, or for the individual Christian’s faith and life. I’m simply saying that in the Divine Service, the chief venue for catechizing our people in the Faith, quantity is not as important as quality – *non multa, sed multum*. The quality and focus of key Scripture passages really takes precedence over the amount of passages covered in the course of time. This is the strength of the One-Year Lectionary.

Well, after three years of preaching the *Lutheran Worship* One-Year Lectionary, I returned to the Three-Year so that I could study with other pastors around me. That lasted only a year and a half until the proposed One-Year Lectionary for *Lutheran Service Book* came out. I found it very refreshing to return home and plunge back into the annual repetition and the catechetical structure of the historic series. So here I stay! 😊

**Another reason for sticking with the One-Year Lectionary actually comes from our Lutheran Confessions.** It's amazing how much our Confessions teach us to preserve and hold on to the things of the past.<sup>1</sup> Listen to this from the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*: "*Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved. We also keep traditional liturgical forms such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things*" (Ap. XXIV:1; KW, 258, emphasis added). For the Reformers it was a matter of public confession to hold to the "traditional liturgical forms such as the order of readings," etc.

We can couple that with some striking evidence that the historic One-Year Lectionary shaped Luther's catechesis. In the *Large Catechism*, for example, Luther catechizes on the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, "You shall not murder." At one point he appeals to a Gospel reading that his people, young and old, would hear every year on the Sixth Sunday after Trinity. Luther says: "*This commandment is easy enough to understand, and it has often been treated because we hear Matthew 5 every year in the Gospel lesson, where Christ himself explains and summarizes it: We must not kill, either by hand, heart, or word, by signs or gestures, or by aiding and abetting. It forbids anger except, as we have said, to persons who function in God's stead, that is, parents and governing authorities*" (LC I:182; KW 411, emphasis added). Of course, Luther was referring to Matthew 5:20-26, where Jesus teaches "You shall not murder" and includes things like getting angry and calling someone a fool. The point is this: an annual cycle of readings makes it quite easy in ongoing catechesis to refer to a reading with which the congregation is familiar. Luther exemplifies this well.

Another place where Luther demonstrates a catechetical benefit to the historic One-Year Lectionary is in the Second Article of the Creed. As you'll remember, Luther focuses simply on what it means that Jesus is our "Redeemer" and "Lord." He does not go into a lot of details on the life of Jesus. Instead, he leaves that catechesis to the regular, annual round of readings in the Divine Service. Here's Luther: "*But the proper place to explain all these different points is not in the brief children's sermon, but rather the longer sermons throughout the whole year, especially at the times appointed for dealing at length with such articles as Christ's birth, passion, resurrection, ascension, etc.*" (LC II:32; KW 435, emphasis added). Such catechesis is, I contend, most reliable when the readings stay the same from year to year.

**A third and final reason I suggest for preaching the One-Year Lectionary is that people catch on.** They begin to soak up and assimilate the annual pattern of sound words and sound teaching. They may not always realize it. They may never intentionally articulate it to the pastor. But they do pick up the routine and the flow. Let me offer one bit of anecdotal evidence. As I preached the *Lutheran Worship* One-Year

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. AC XXIV:40: "No novelty has been introduced that did not exist in the church in the days of old" (KW, 72).

Lectionary for those three years, one parishioner revealed how she had benefited from the annual repetition. I was visiting this pious lady and her husband in their home. We had talked about several things, and then suddenly she asked a question about repentance. As she asked her question, she said, "I have a question about repentance and one of the Bible stories you often preach on. It's that story that comes up sometime in August every year." She was referring to Luke 18:9-14, Jesus' Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. It comes up every year on the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, and, yes, that usually falls in August. The annual repetition of the lectionary lodged that Bible story in this woman's heart and mind, and she remembered it to use with her question. Again, "repetition is the mother of learning," especially in matters of faith and life. That's why I preach and advocate preaching the One-Year Lectionary.

Wilhelm Loehe captured the point well. He said, "A man who changes texts every year is no good as a preacher for the people or, we might say, for the church. Always to say something different and new without connecting it with well-known texts will be received with a great deal of difficulty, but all new ideas are received easily and gratefully when they appear as fresh approaches to the old truth" (*Three Books on the Church*, 169).

## SHAPE & CONTENT OF THE ONE-YEAR LECTIONARY

Let's move on to the shape and content of the One-Year Lectionary. Not only does this add to our answer of "Why preach the One-Year Series?" but it also prepares us preachers for actually preaching it. Some things about the shape and content of the One-Year Lectionary may indeed apply to the Three-Year. However, I contend that the One-Year holds the shape and communicates the central truths of the Faith much more clearly and overtly. Whereas the Three-Year Lectionary puts the premium on quantity of Biblical texts and successive readings from selected Biblical books, the One-Year Lectionary very clearly keeps our focus on the life of Christ and the resulting life of the Church.

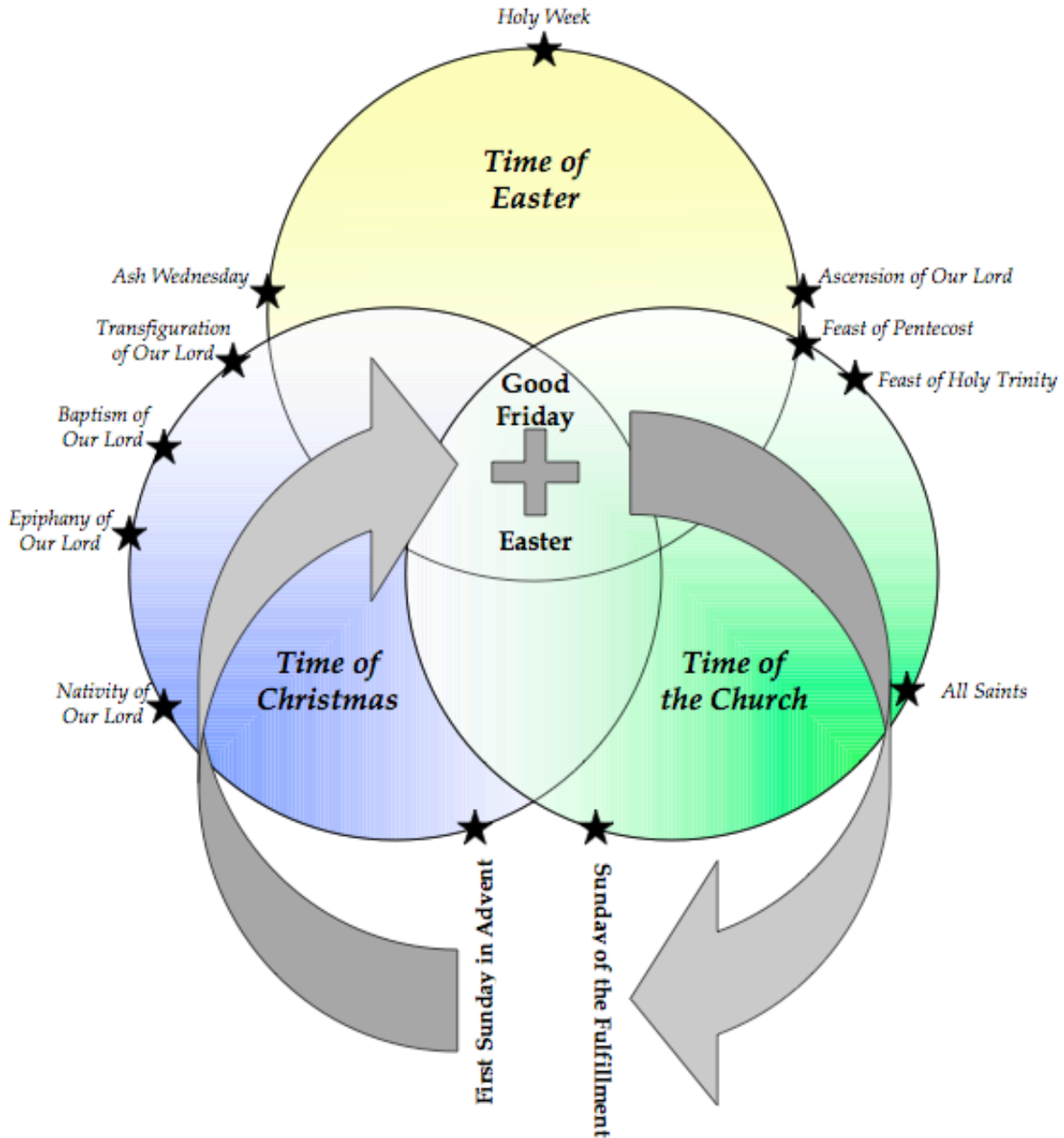
### The "Trinitarian Shape"

The shape of the One-Year Lectionary that I put before you is **the "Trinitarian Shape."** This is not original with me; I learned it from Professor John Pless some years ago (before he was professor). As I recall, he first diagramed it with a simple drawing of three interlocking circles, with the Cross of Christ in the center portion where all three circles overlap. On your handout you have a newer, more polished version based on the one from Professor Pless.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> From his Course Syllabus for "PMM 225 CHURCH YEAR" at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN. See the PDF file at this website: <http://www.ctsfw.edu/academics/faculty/pless/ChurchYear.pdf>, page 5.

# Trinitarian Shape of the Christian Year



In this diagram you can see the “Trinitarian Shape” of the Church Year. The first circle (left) shows the “Time of Christmas,” when God the Father gives the gift of His Son, wrapped up in our human flesh and blood to restore us to the image of God. The second circle (top, center) shows the “Time of Easter,” when God the Son gives Himself as the atoning sacrifice to redeem us from sin and death and restore us to eternal life with God. And the third circle (right) shows the “Time of the Church,” when our Savior

gives us the gift of God the Holy Spirit who “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the Christian church on earth and keeps [her] with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” The Holy Spirit makes our restored image and forgiven life with God a reality through faith even now. At the heart of the diagram, where all three circles overlap, you see Good Friday, the Cross, and Easter. The whole Church Year focuses on these events. The “Time of Christmas” prepares us for them; the “Time of Easter” reveals them to us; and “The Time of the Church” proclaims them for our very life in the Church.

So far you may be wondering, “What’s so different between the One-Year and the Three-Year?” In broad, general strokes, we can see good similarities. We see the differences, however, in the details. With this in mind, let’s walk through the Church Year via the One-Year Lectionary.

### **Advent**

Consider the Gospel reading for the First Sunday in Advent. Historically, before the Three-Year Series, the Church always heard one story on Advent 1: Jesus’ Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-9). “What in the world does that have to do with Advent and Christmas?” you may ask. “That sounds like Holy Week and getting ready for Easter.” Yes, you’re right! And that’s the point. The historic lectionary begins the year by focusing on the Advent of our King who comes to us lowly and riding on a donkey, coming to die and rise again to save us from sin and death. This story puts the whole Advent preparation and Christmas celebration in the proper light. Advent remains a time of repentance and fasting, because we realize that the Son of God came and took on our flesh in order to restore us fallen sinners to life with God, life we human beings had lost in our sin. The Christmas joy and celebration are colored by the fact that Christ’s Incarnation, as joyous, important and life-giving as it ultimately is, is only the foretaste, or the beginning, of the greater feast to come.

Now, in all fairness, the Three-Year Lectionary in *Lutheran Worship* did have the Palm Sunday reading as the second option for Advent 1, but please note that it got demoted to “an option,” and each year it would be from a different Gospel, either Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Then in *Lutheran Service Book* that “Palm Sunday option” gets moved to the first position, but there’s still the other option listed for the more “End Times inclined” among us. I guess it just goes to show that even the new *LSB* Three-Year Lectionary has to tip its hat to the historic One-Year Series! ☺

Let’s continue walking through Advent. Whereas the Three-Year series draws our attention to the words and works of John the Baptist, the Gospels of the One-Year series call us to listen to our Lord. On Advent 2 our Lord teaches us on the End Times (Luke 21). His coming in the flesh inaugurates the End Times as we learn to view the End Times through the prism of His cross and empty tomb. On Advent 3 we hear from our Lord as He teaches about John the Baptist as well as the purpose of His Coming (Matt. 11). John was the messenger crying out in the wilderness, but Jesus is the greater one who gives sight to the blind, heals the lame, the lepers, and the deaf, raises the dead,

and preaches the Gospel to the poor. Advent gives us much more than John saying, "Here comes the King!" It actually gives us the King, who first came humbly riding on a donkey and heading for the Cross, and who still comes to heal and comfort us so that we may be ready for His final coming on the Last Day.

The "Top Ten" list (#4) above made mention of the rose colored candle in the Advent wreath. The One-Year Lectionary gives us the reason for it. Traditionally, the names of the Sundays come from the Introit, specifically the first word or phrase in Latin. The Introit-given title for Advent 3 is "*Gaudete*", "Rejoice!" The lighter rose color lightens up the darker, more penitential purple color. The call to "Rejoice" gives us a brief let-up in the Advent fasting and preparing, and it reminds us that the true joy is soon to come in celebrating the Birth of Christ Incarnate. This brief pause to rejoice, this brief let-up in repentant preparation, sustains us to continue the Advent fasting and preparing for another week or more until the Feast of the Nativity.

On Advent 4 we finally get to hear from John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, himself. And what does he say? He confesses quite clearly in the account from John 1, "I am not the Christ." But the fact that we hear of John's work of baptizing means that the Christ is soon to come. And, as the Epistle reading for this day indicates, the time for rejoicing is at hand. We're about to celebrate our Lord's Incarnation and Birth.

<i>Sunday in Advent</i>	<i>Holy Gospel</i>	<i>Theme</i>
<b>First Sunday in Advent</b> <i>Ad Te Levavi</i>	<b>Matthew 21:1-9</b> Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)	Preparing to celebrate the Birth of Christ also means looking ahead to His death and resurrection.
<b>Second Sunday in Advent</b> <i>Populus Zion</i>	<b>Luke 21:25-36</b> Jesus teaches on the signs of the End Times.	When Jesus comes in the flesh, He inaugurates the End of Time, when He will come again in glory.
<b>Third Sunday in Advent</b> <i>Gaudete</i>	<b>Matthew 11:2-11</b> Jesus receives disciples of John the Baptist and teaches on John.	Jesus comes to heal and preach the Gospel. He is the "least one" in the kingdom, and thus greater than John.
<b>Fourth Sunday in Advent</b> <i>Rorate Coeli</i>	<b>John 1:19-28</b> John the Baptist confesses that he is not the Christ, but he does prepare the way for Him.	As John prepared for Christ's coming, we soon get to rejoice in His coming.

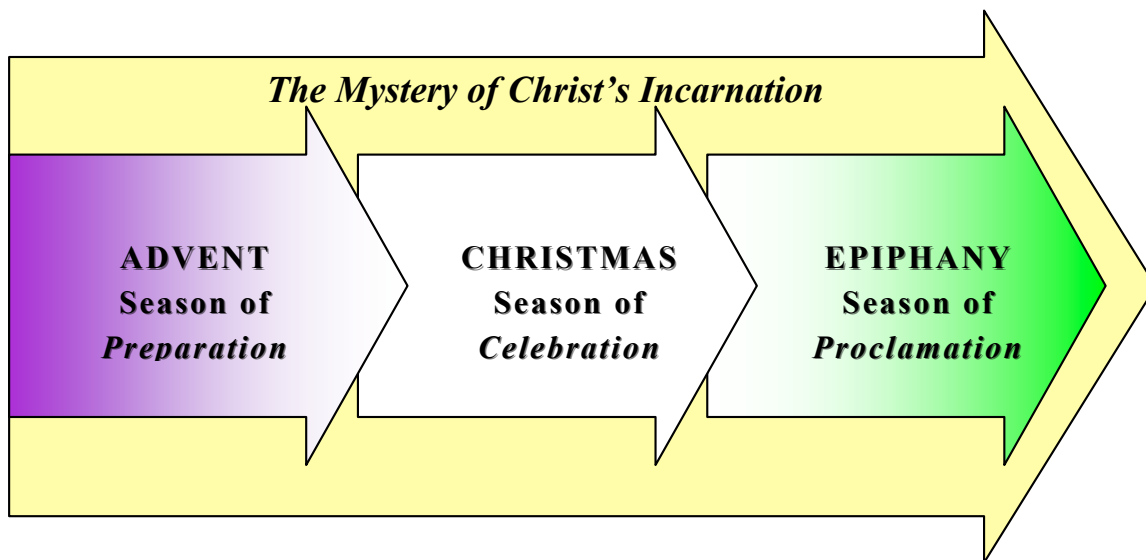
### **Christmas & Epiphany**

Following the Advent preparation comes the Christmas celebration. For twelve whole days we get to celebrate our Lord's Birth. (Wouldn't it be great if we could take the Christmas parties that invade the month of December and place them in the real time of celebration, the Twelve Days of Christmas?) Here the two lectionary series share much common ground in giving us the birth and early life of our Lord. This is certainly the time to proclaim how we are restored to our real humanity, to the image of God, in Christ's Incarnation. It's also a good time to proclaim the gift of bodily life that comes from God, and even apply it to Pro-Life issues (abortion, stem cell research, euthanasia,



etc.).<sup>3</sup> And then from the Christmas celebration we move into the Epiphany proclamation, the time when we hear the great mystery of the Son of God taking on our flesh and His work of lifting us up and restoring us to our true humanity. The various readings reveal the Son of God in the flesh living, speaking, and working to restore humanity to His image. Here, the two lectionary systems are similar.

We can illustrate the flow of the “Time of Christmas” this way:



### **Transfiguration & Pre-Lent**

At the end of the Epiphany season, and thus the “Time of Christmas,” we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord. Here the One-Year and the Three-Year Lectionaries part company for a time. In the Three-Year Lectionary, the Transfiguration comes on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. In the One-Year Series, though, the Transfiguration comes three weeks before Lent begins. Remember #3 from our “Top Ten,” about confusing pastors in your Circuit by celebrating Transfiguration three weeks earlier? Why is that? Well, the brilliant radiance of Christ revealing Himself to the world, and revealing our future of being fully restored humanity in Him, comes quite appropriately at the end of Epiphany (a Lutheran contribution to the Church Year, by the way; Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox celebrate the Transfiguration in early August). But to go from the glorious mountain top experience of Christ’s Transfiguration all the way down to the depths of Ash Wednesday’s stark, somber repentance, within a mere three days, seems, well, a bit sudden and jolting. So, historically, the Church has seen fit to build in some transition time, some time to “shift gears,” as it were, from the Mystery of Christ’s Incarnation to the Mystery of His Crucifixion and Resurrection.

---

<sup>3</sup> Here I think especially of Dr. David Scaer’s excellent sermon for Holy Innocent’s Day in which he address the American holocaust of abortion.

This time of transition we call “Pre-Lent.” Here’s where #1 from the “Top Ten” list comes in – showing off your learning by saying words like “Septuagesima,” “Sexagesima,” and “Quinquagesima.” ☺ These names actually begin the countdown to Easter, the highest and holiest day of the entire Church Year. We’re quite used to the genuine and churchly “40 days of purpose” called Lent. That’s the time for the *bona fide* and rigorous preparation to celebrate Christ’s Passion and Resurrection. Now, there’s some genuine purpose for you! The “-gesima” Sundays simply add to the countdown. *Septuagesima* means 70-some days until Easter, *Sexagesima*, 60-some days, and *Quinquagesima*, 50-some days. It’s simply an approximate calculation to start turning our hearts and minds toward Holy Week and Easter.

When a pastor preaches the texts and themes of Pre-Lent, he is actually doing two things. One, he is getting the parishioners ready for the rigors of Lent. Two, he is preparing the catechumens for their six-week intensive training in the Christian faith and life. In his manual *Planning the Service* Ralph Gehrke says this about Pre-Lent: “The period of Pre-Lent is, so to say, the narthex in which we Christians pause for three Sundays before we begin our spiritual pilgrimage to Calvary in the great 40 days of Lent” (42). Fred Lindemann says that the three Sundays of Pre-Lent “are a prelude to the whole Easter Cycle, a recruiting period for the Kingdom of God, a time of propaganda in which God calls for enlistment. For two and one-half weeks the Church enlists workers from within and without” (*The Sermon and the Propers*, III:19).

When Lindemann mentions enlisting workers, he’s referring first to enrolling catechumens for their intensive catechesis during Lent and second to preparing the faithful for their yearly journey through Lent. So the three Sundays of Pre-Lent teach the catechumens and remind the faithful how God’s kingdom operates. On *Septuagesima* Sunday (Third Sunday before Lent) we hear the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). For those who labor in God’s vineyard – and yes, fasting, praying, almsgiving, and learning the faith are salutary labors! – the “wages” come only by God’s grace. On *Sexagesima* Sunday (Second Sunday before Lent) we hear the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15), who scatters his seed on the four kinds of soil. Life in God’s kingdom comes only by the Incarnate Word whom God the Father sows in the world, and that Word (Christ) bears much fruit in the fertile soil of faith. And on *Quinquagesima* Sunday (the Sunday before Lent) we hear Jesus predict His Passion as He goes up to Jerusalem. Right after His prediction, Jesus heals a blind man outside of Jericho (Luke 18:31-43). As we prepare to journey to Jerusalem during the great season of Lent, only Jesus can open our eyes of faith so that we can fix them on Him as He journeys to the Cross. Thus we learn to go through Lent only by faith.

<i>Pre-Lent Sunday</i>	<i>Holy Gospel</i>	<i>Theme</i>
<b>Septuagesima</b> “70-some days” (Third Sunday before Lent)	<b>Matthew 20:1-16</b> Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard	<b>GRACE</b> <i>Even through the discipline of Lent, we receive our “wages” only by God’s grace.</i>

<b><i>Sexagesima</i></b> “60-some days” (Second Sunday before Lent)	<b>Luke 8:4-15</b> Parable of the Sower & the Four Soils	<b>WORD</b> <i>During Lent the Word will be planted in us and will be received differently by different hearers.</i>
<b><i>Quinquagesima</i></b> “50-some days” (The Sunday before Lent)	<b>Luke 18:31-43</b> Jesus Goes Up to Jerusalem & Heals a Blind Man	<b>FAITH</b> <i>As we go up to Jerusalem on our Lenten journey, Jesus must open our eyes of faith to see Him.</i>

If the great season of Lent can be compared to a long journey, then a time of preparation makes perfect sense. After all, no one merely jumps in the car on the spur of the moment and spontaneously sets out on a cross-country trip from New York to Los Angeles. Plans must be made. Maps must be consulted. Bags must be packed. The car must be loaded. The travelers are wise to anticipate and prepare for the journey that lies ahead. This is what Pre-Lent does in the One-Year Lectionary: it helps us prepare for the 40-day journey to Holy Week and Easter.

### **Lent**

Now we turn to the great season of Lent. Ash Wednesday brings us back to the life of somber repentance. After all, it was our sin that led to the Son of God being humiliated and crucified. Along with the repentance, we hear our Lord teach us the three salutary disciplines of Lent: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving (Matthew 6). We fast not to earn our way into God’s good graces, but rather to discipline our bodies and their cravings so that we can focus on God’s undeserved mercy. That discipline, in turn, makes us more amenable to increased devotion and prayer. Not relying so much on food and other pleasures of life, we can turn our focus to delighting in God and His mercies in Christ. And with the money we save from fasting we can turn our attention away from ourselves and serve our needy neighbor. Almsgiving is vital too.

From Ash Wednesday on, we learn that Lent is not a 40-day period of watching Jesus suffer and die and then feeling sorry for Him. No, Lent is about learning to live in our Baptism, that is, in dying and rising with Christ. The focus of Lent, the genuine, historic “40 days of purpose,” is really catechetical. As Lindemann says, “The basic purpose of Lent was the preparation for the rising to newness of life at Easter” (III:43). I would change his past tense into the present tense. The purpose of Lent is still to prepare us for the new life of Easter!

The Sundays in Lent, then, have a unique structure and purpose. Once again, I think this comes out best in the One-Year Lectionary. The texts and themes of the Sundays in Lent also address both the catechumens and the faithful. Lent is not meant to be a 40-day Passion Week. Rather, Lent is time for catechizing in the faith, for preparing for the Passion proper when it comes later.

On the First Sunday in Lent, *Invocabit*, we hear the story of our Lord’s temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Yes, just as Satan tempted Adam and Eve in Paradise, he

also tempts the New Adam in the wilderness. But whereas Adam and Eve succumbed and gave in to Satan's wiles, Christ overcame the old satanic foe. So, yes, you Christians, both new catechumens and old faithful, you too must do battle with Satan. But Christ is the victor who conquers on your behalf, and we'll see that victory on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

The Second Sunday in Lent, *Reminiscere*, gives us the Canaanite woman as she figuratively wrestles with Jesus and with trusting in Him (Matthew 15:21-28). She begs for healing for her demon-possessed daughter, but the Lord of Life gives her the silent treatment, then He says He did not come for her kind, and finally He even calls her a dog. Yes, you catechumens and you seasoned Christians, this catechetical time of Lent reminds you that you may even have to wrestle with God Himself as you learn and grow in faith. But as He did for the Canaanite woman, He does commend the faith that trusts in Him and He even grants the healing. For the woman, He healed her daughter; for us catechumens, new and old, He heals us at Easter.

On the Third Sunday of Lent, *Oculi*, we see that the cosmic war takes place between Christ with His kingdom vs. Satan with his kingdom. In Luke 11:14-28 Jesus is the Stronger Man who binds strong Satan for us, robs him of his weapons, and divides the spoils. He shall win the Easter victory. Our battles against our sinful flesh, the world, and the devil will not be in vain. Our struggles at disciplining ourselves through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving will not be in vain. Again, this is the catechetical thrust of the Sundays in Lent as we prepare for the central mystery of the Christian faith: the resurrection victory of our Lord and His gift of new life to us.

The Fourth Sunday in Lent also goes by the Latin name *Laetare*, which means "Rejoice!" Remember the Third Sunday in Advent, *Gaudete*, and the rose colored candle on the Advent wreath? It was a small break in the Advent fast. *Laetare*, the Fourth Sunday in Lent, is also a brief pause in the rigors of the Lenten fast. We've been catechized on what it means to prepare for Christ's atoning death and His victory over the grave. Now we pause to be refreshed as we head into the last leg of the journey. On this Sunday we hear John 6:1-15, the story of Jesus feeding the 5000, and we can't miss the Sacramental connections that go with that account. Gehrke puts it this way: "On the fourth Sunday great joy breaks through the earnestness of battle, and we enjoy a 'preview' of Easter; in fact, in many places this Sunday in Lent is called 'Little Easter.' The Gospel speaks of the feeding of the five thousand with the bread of life and points to the wondrous food of the Sacrament which sustains us in life's battle" (47).<sup>4</sup>

After this little break of joy, we return to the rigors of Lent. However, *now* is the time to plunge into the Passion of our Lord. On the Fifth Sunday in Lent, *Judica*, High Priest Jesus comes from His eternal home to dispense eternal life for us. How does He do this?

---

<sup>4</sup> And just in case you're wondering, yes, I do think John 6 teaches us on the Sacrament, and, yes, I do think Luther either blinked or was just plain wrong when told Zwingli that it did not refer to the Sacrament!

As we hear from John 8:46-59, this One whose day Abraham rejoiced to see, this One who equates Himself with the great "I AM," God Himself, will suffer rejection and death. Historically, this day was called "Passion Sunday" and introduced "Passion Tide," one week of preparing for the Passion of our Lord and then a second week of journeying with our Lord through His last week and to Calvary and the Empty Tomb. "Passion Sunday" and Palm Sunday the following week were separate and each had their own purpose and function. In the Three-Year Lectionary, however, and now also in the *LSB* One-Year, these two Sundays have been conflated into one. The result is that Palm Sunday gets only a passing nod in the Entrance Rite (the Processional reading), and then we're off to the endurance run of the long Passion Readings on the Sunday before Holy Week. In effect we impatiently compress all of Holy Week into one Sunday.

<b>Sunday in Lent</b>	<b>Holy Gospel</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Ash Wednesday</b>	<b>Matthew 6:(1-6) 16-21</b> Jesus teaches on almsgiving, praying, and fasting, and not to do such works for the praise of men.	Repentance for our sins and our fall from God's mercy. Exhortation to Lenten disciplines of fasting, prayer, almsgiving.
<b>First Sunday in Lent</b> <i>Invocavit</i>	<b>Matthew 4:1-11</b> Jesus is tempted by Satan and overcomes him to reverse the Fall of Eden	Just as our Lord did, we must do battle with Satan, but our Lord Jesus conquers him for us.
<b>Second Sunday in Lent</b> <i>Reminiscere</i>	<b>Matthew 15:21-28</b> The Canaanite woman trusts Jesus despite appearances	Just as the Canaanite woman experienced, we may have to wrestle with God Himself, but our Lord commends such faith.
<b>Third Sunday in Lent</b> <i>Oculi</i>	<b>Luke 11:14-28</b> Our Lord binds strong man Satan and disarms him for us.	The real battle is between Christ and His kingdom vs. Satan and his kingdom.
<b>Fourth Sunday in Lent</b> <i>Laetare</i>	<b>John 6:1-15</b> Jesus feeds the 5000 and thus promises to feed us on His life-giving Body and Blood to sustain us.	The joy of Easter breaks through and sustains us. The Lord of life feeds us on Himself to sustain us so that we can celebrate His Easter life.
<b>Fifth Sunday in Lent</b> <b>"Passion Sunday"</b> <i>Judica</i>	<b>John 8:46-59</b> Jesus is the great "I AM" whose day Abraham rejoiced to see, but who is rejected to suffer and die.	Our great High Priest comes from eternity to dispense His gift of eternal life through His Passion.

### **Holy Week & Easter**

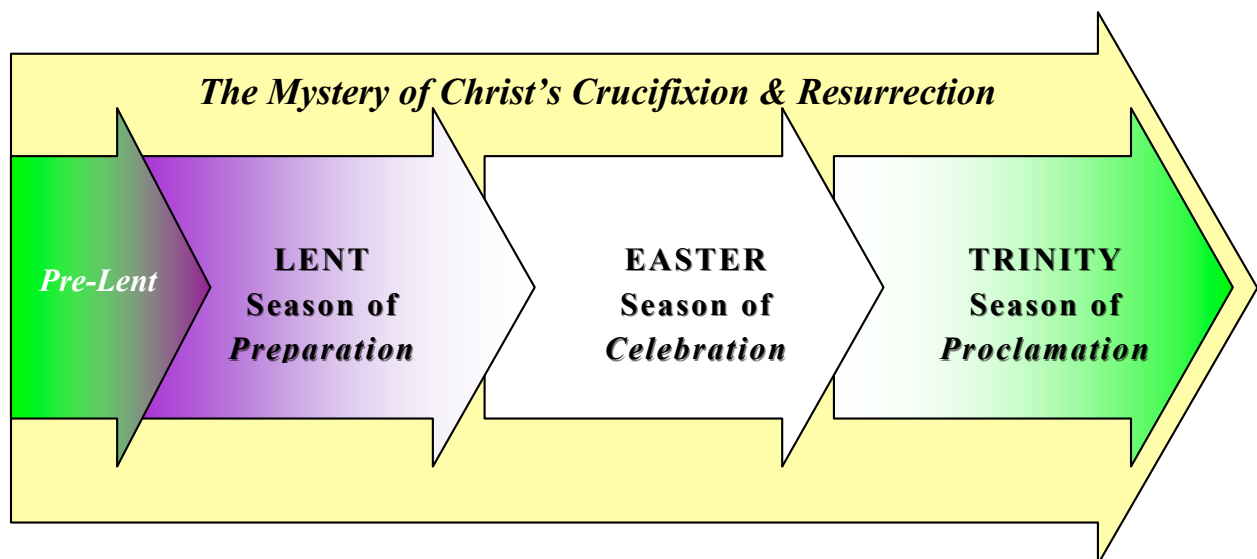
While we normally consider Palm Sunday and Holy Week as part of Lent, we could probably view it as a new and separate season, the season of Holy Week & Easter, the great Eight Days. This most sacred time of the Christian year certainly deserves to stand on its own. And as you recall from the "Trinitarian Shape" of the liturgical year, this is the time toward which everything since Advent has been driving us. We began the Church Year with the story of Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem as the foretaste of the feast to come. Well, now we are sitting down to dine, and we begin by watching our King enter in stark humility as He rides on in majesty hidden and with the express purpose of dying for us. The days of Holy Week actually lead us through the last days of our Lord's life before He was sacrificed on the Cross for us.

On “Palm/Passion Sunday” we hear the Passion account from Matthew. On Holy Monday, we hear St. John’s version of Palm Sunday (John 12), and then on Holy Tuesday and Holy Wednesday we hear the Passion accounts from St. Mark and St. Luke, respectively. Then on Holy (Maundy) Thursday, we begin arriving at the pinnacle of the Church Year. From John 13 we hear of Jesus’ ministry of love in washing the feet of His disciples, and that ministry of love shows up most prominently in the Holy Supper. On Good Friday, the most proper time to focus on the Passion of Our Lord, we hear St. John’s account of Jesus’ Passion and Crucifixion (John 18-19).

The starkness and somberness of Good Friday gives way to the radiant light and glorious rejoicing of Easter. But must we really wait until Sunday morning, after Easter egg hunts and Easter breakfasts, before we can pull out the stops and sing our Alleluias? No. The One-Year Lectionary, as does the Three-Year, advocates celebrating the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening. As we hold vigil, several readings recap the story of God’s salvation through the Old Testament and finally revealed in His Son’s death and resurrection. This is also the time when the catechumens are baptized and/or confirmed in the faith. After all, we want them to join us in receiving the “wages” for laboring in God’s kingdom through Lent by enjoying the forgiveness and life of God in Christ.

And, of course, Easter Sunday finally brings us to the highest mountain peak in the Church Year. Here we all know what the message is: death has been swallowed up in victory; Christ has become the first fruits of them that sleep. Or, as one historic verse proclaims it, “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!” Again, the One-Year and the Three-Year Lectionaries share some very good common ground.

As we did with the “Time of Christmas,” we can diagram the flow of the “Time of Easter” this way:



## **Easter-Tide**

We would not give Easter the proper honor if we celebrated Christ's Resurrection on only one Sunday and then moved on to other things. So the Church Year gives us a week of Sundays – seven whole weeks! – to celebrate Christ's victory over death and the grave. While both the Three-Year and the One-Year Lectionaries give us the seven weeks of Easter-tide, I believe that the One-Year gives a more connected whole for celebrating the new life of resurrection in Christ. The annual Easter-tide reminds us that Easter is not finished once Easter Sunday has come and gone. No, Easter continues, the joy goes on, and Christ's Resurrection begins to reshape and reorient our whole life this side of eternity. In fact, Easter-tide says, "Easter may be the high point of the year, but it's not the end of Christ's work."

On the Second Sunday of Easter, *Quasimodo Geniti*, the newly baptized and the faithful are reminded of what makes them "like newborn babes": the forgiveness of sins that Jesus gives to His Church to proclaim and practice. Thus we hear the story of John 20, when the Risen Lord breathes on His disciples, gives them the Holy Spirit, and ordains them to forgive or retain sins. This is the life of the Church; this is the new life into which we all are baptized. The new Easter life continues in the Holy Absolution, and we begin living the life of heaven here on earth.

In the One-Year Series, "Good Shepherd Sunday" comes on the Third Sunday of Easter (one week earlier than in the Three-Year Series). In Latin this day is called *Misericordias Domini*, "Tender Mercies of the Lord," Sunday. Here the Church gives us a wonderful picture for our Risen Lord: the Good Shepherd (John 10) who tends and keeps us, His flock, as He leads us through the valley of the shadow of this world. Even for many of us who are "city-slickers" this image brings rich Gospel comfort.

When we come to the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we turn from looking to the past events of our salvation and begin looking to the future events of our salvation. On this Sunday, also called *Jubilate*, we "make a joyful noise" over the new life that Christ gives us, but we also begin to look forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel readings from this day forward come from John 16, in the context of Jesus teaching His disciples on the Holy Spirit. On *Jubilate* we hear Jesus prepare His disciples and us for the "little while" of separation from Him. What the disciples experienced between Maundy Thursday evening and the morning of Easter Sunday, and what they would experience after His Ascension, we also experience during the time from His Ascension until the Last Day. But the Holy Spirit will sustain us in the joy of Christ's Resurrection until we can be united with Him permanently in eternity.

On the Fifth Sunday of Easter we learn to sing the joys of our new life in Christ. That's why this day has the name *Cantate*, or "Sing!" The Introit and the Old Testament

reading exhort us to sing because our Lord has redeemed and restored us. The Holy Gospel, though, keeps moving us toward Pentecost. Here Jesus prepares us for the sorrow of living in this world but also promises the Holy Spirit, the Helper who will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:5-15). The Easter joy and life continue as the Holy Spirit leads us, His Church, into all truth.

The Sixth Sunday of Easter is also called *Rogate*, or “Pray!” Sunday. We again hear our Lord’s instruction on the Holy Spirit coming to comfort and sustain us in the world, and He bids us to pray to the Father because the Father loves us (John 16:23-30). Relying on and calling upon our heavenly Father is what we were originally created to do. Now, in the new life of Easter, we begin practicing what we were made to do, what we are restored to do, and what we will do for all eternity: calling upon our heavenly Father who loves us.

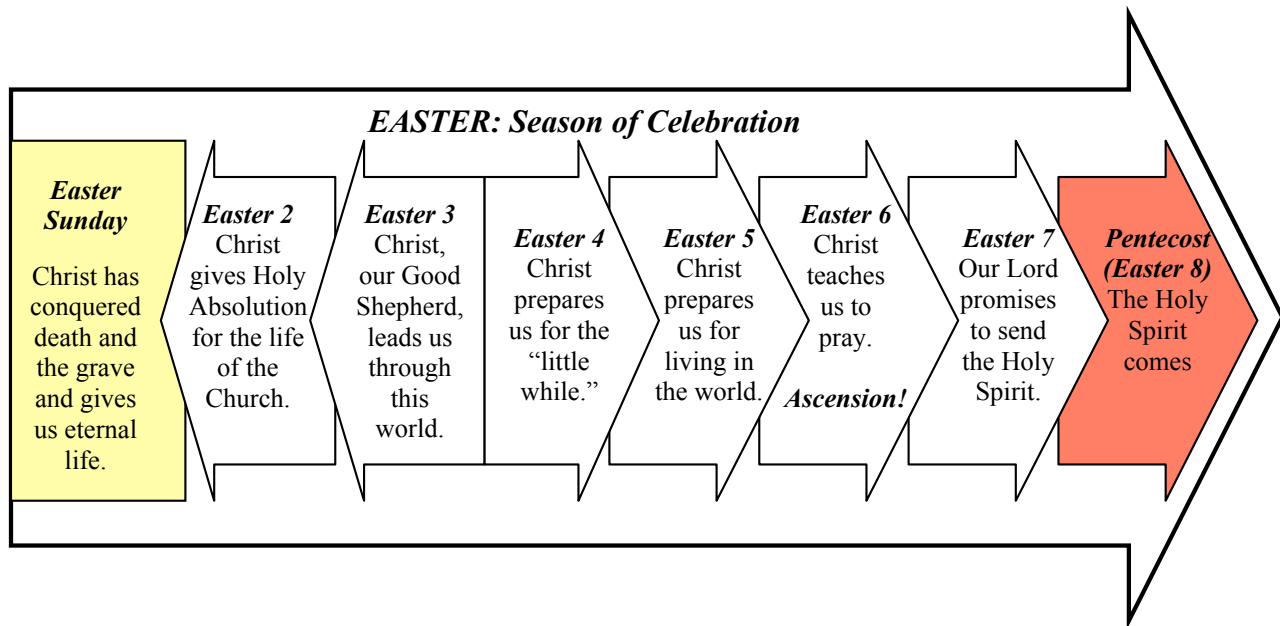
Forty days after Easter the Church celebrates the Ascension of our Lord. Now if there’s one day that says, “Easter is not over nor is it the end,” it’s the Ascension of our Lord. On this day, which is always a Thursday, the Church celebrates Christ’s ascension and session at the right hand of God. We can also call it His “enthronement” as our Divine-Human King. On this day we hear the story of Jesus’ Ascension from Acts 1, and then we hear St. Mark’s account of our Lord commissioning the Eleven to “proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.” Yes, in Christ and His death and resurrection, all of creation is restored, and thus the Church proclaims that Gospel for all of creation, and especially for the crown of creation, us sinful human beings. And when Jesus ascends to the Father’s right hand, we in the Church take great delight and comfort. You see, our Risen Lord rules over all things for the good of His Church. Here’s one reason why the message of Christ’s atoning work is not finished at Easter Sunday.

On the Seventh Sunday of Easter, *Exaudi*, we call out to our Savior God not to forsake us but to aid us by sending His Holy Spirit. So we get to hear our Lord in John 15:26-16:4 promise to send the Holy Spirit. As He says, “*When the Helper comes, whom I will send from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me*” (John 15:26).

As we wrap up our tour through Easter-tide, it’s good to remember that Pentecost Sunday is really part of the “Time of Easter.” (I think that the Three-Year Lectionary has effectively short circuited this connection by referring to “Sundays after *Pentecost*” rather than “Sundays after *Trinity*.”) Christ’s work of redeeming and restoring us is not quite done yet. He still must send the Holy Spirit as He promised, and as the lectionary has been reminding us through Easter-tide. And while this may be new with me (so watch out!), Pentecost Sunday nicely rounds out Easter-tide as the “*Eighth Sunday of Easter*.” Remember, eight is the number of new creation. As Easter Sunday is the Eighth Day of Holy Week, thus proclaiming God’s new creation in Christ’s Resurrection, perhaps we can view Pentecost Sunday as the *Eighth Sunday of Easter* that proclaims the new creation, the new life of faith that comes via the Holy Spirit. Of course, that new



creation of the Holy Spirit is the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel to all creation, and faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. So we could diagram the flow of Easter-tide this way:



### Trinity Season - The Life of the Church

Time will not allow me to go into much detail about the "green season" known as the "Trinity Season" or the "Time of the Church." Here the various readings appointed teach us on the Christian's life of faith, on the life of the Church, and, toward the end of the cycle, life under the Cross of suffering and persecution. As the "Trinitarian Shape" diagram points out, the "Time of the Church" really moves us through this world of sin and death and leads us to the Sunday of the Fulfillment. This world is not our home; we are eagerly waiting for and journeying toward our heavenly home.

Some say that there is no rhyme or reason in the green "Trinity Season," while others try to find a pattern. One way that seems to give some general structure is to break up the "green season" according to some of the minor festivals. Gehrke advocates this structure:

We can gain some sort of overview of this long season of many, seemingly undifferentiated Sundays if we see how the Scripture readings group themselves around important festivals, whose central themes they then reinforce and emphasize: (I) the recent Pentecost festival; (II) St. John the Baptist's Day, June 24; (III) Michaelmas, the Festival of the Archangel Michael and of the Holy Angels, September 29; (IV) the End of the Church Year. (74)

Gehrke then goes on to elaborate each of these four “phases” of the Trinity Season (see p. 74). It may be somewhat arbitrary, but then again it’s a handy way to help the preacher focus on different themes, indeed, on the whole counsel of God. Allow me to encapsulate Gehrke’s structure this way:

<i>Phase of Trinity Season</i>	<i>Sundays in Trinity Season</i>	<i>Overarching Theme</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
<b>Trinity I</b>	<b>Trinity 1-5</b>	<b>“The Church of the Spirit”</b>	How the Spirit’s Church originates and what goes on within her. “It is under the influence of the Holy Spirit that the church arises and flourishes” (75).
<b>Trinity II</b>	<b>Trinity 6-11 Trinity 12-18</b>	<b>“Christian Faith” “Christian Love Toward One’s Neighbor”</b>	The words of John the Baptist become the motto for us Christians: “He must increase; I must decrease.” “This is the pattern of Christian sanctification. This is characteristic of Christian faith and love” (82)
<b>Trinity III</b>	<b>Trinity 19-25</b>	<b>“The Christian’s Struggle against Satan”</b>	The Church struggles against the forces of Satan as he fights against God’s kingdom. “St. Michael’s victory over Satan is none other than Christ’s Easter victory” (98). <i>Note well: Reformation falls in this phase.</i>
<b>Trinity IV</b>	<b>Last 3 Sundays</b>	<b>“Our Christian Hope”</b>	The End Times & Christ’s Return “It is clear to Christians that we must all appear before the judgment seat of God. Nevertheless a new reality has appeared on earth and is even now present, though as yet hidden and secret” (107).

## RESOURCES

Finally, let me offer some resources that help the pastor preach the One-Year Lectionary. This is by no means an exhaustive list; it’s simply a listing of sources that I have found helpful and that I have at my fingertips. I’m sure there are many more resources to add, especially since this Lectionary has been around for so many centuries.

I have already referred to two good resources for preparation and for the central thoughts of the seasons and the days of the Church Year. First is the little manual called *Planning the Service: A Workbook for Pastors, Organists, and Choirmasters* by Ralph Gehrke (CPH, 1961). This source has helped me with the overall structure of the Church Year and the One-Year Series.

The second resource that I have already mentioned is *The Sermon and the Propers* (4 volumes) by Fred H. Lindemann, again published by CPH (1958). This source fleshes out the bones that Gehrke gives as it gives more details and more explanation.

Specifically for sermon preparation we can always look to Luther's sermons. As #10 on the "Top Ten" list said, "You can always find a Luther sermon on that text, as well as some other nice resources." His *Church Postils* give very lengthy treatments of the texts for each Sunday, and his *House Postils* give shorter (for him!) sermons on the very same texts. One great advantage to these sermons from Luther is that you do get a wide range of approaches to the texts that repeat each year. For example, one year Luther used the Christmas story, the narrative of Luke 2, to preach on submitting to the governing authorities, as Christ did when He was born in Caesar's realm (see *House Postils*, First Sermon, 1532, pp. 99-104). And in another year, on the same festival and same text, he preached on Christian vocation. (see *House Postils*, Sixth Sermon, 1534, pp. 148-152). While he does proclaim the text and the person and work of our Savior Jesus Christ, he also helps us consider other lessons, subpoints, or illustrations that we might not otherwise consider.

And finally, one resource that provides an immense treasure trove of preaching helps is "Lectionary Central" on the Internet (<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/>). When you visit this webpage (and, of course, bookmark it for frequent future visits), you will see it set up by the Church Year according to the One-Year Series. When you click on one of the Sundays or festivals (e.g. Trinity 9), you will then see the texts along with links to sermons by various preachers through the centuries. These preachers include St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, Gregory the Great, Leo the Great, and more. They also include sources from the Reformation, especially sermons by Luther and Calvin. You will even find sermons from the folks who brought us the Oxford Movement and various preachers of the twentieth century. Now, of course, the preacher will want to be discerning, but he will certainly find many good ideas, illustrations, and ways of preaching a text.

#### Other Resources

Johann Gerhard, *Postilla: An Interpretation and Explication of The Sunday and Principal Festival Gospels Throughout the Entire Year*. Volume One: The Festival Sundays and Volume Two: The Trinity Sundays. Translated by O Marc Tangner. Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2007.

URL: [http://www.repristinationpress.com/Repristination\\_Press/Online\\_Orders.html](http://www.repristinationpress.com/Repristination_Press/Online_Orders.html)

*Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (4 volumes), M. F. Toal, editor. Ignatius Press, 2009. Website description: "This beautifully bound 4-volume, hard-cover set is a superb series for preaching, spiritual reading and meditation. It contains the Gospel reading for each Sunday and Feast Day, and parallel Gospel texts, along with several sermons for each Gospel from both early Eastern and Western Fathers of the church, including Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Ephraem, Augustine and more.

Also, each sermon is followed by the Catena Aurea (Golden Chain) of St. Thomas Aquinas. There is no better way to enter the mind of the early Church Fathers and the spirit of Sacred Scripture than this series.”

URL: [http://www.ignatius.com/ViewProduct.aspx?SID=1&SKU=SSGF-H&Category\\_ID=11&](http://www.ignatius.com/ViewProduct.aspx?SID=1&SKU=SSGF-H&Category_ID=11&)

## **SUMMARY**

We have taken a brief tour through the One-Year Lectionary, specifically focusing on the festival half of the Church Year, the time of Christ’s saving works for us. We have seen how the “Trinitarian shape” of the Church Year comes out in the One-Year Series. We have seen how seasons such as Advent and Lent prepare us for the times of celebration, namely, Christmas and Easter, respectively. And we have only touched on the ways that the Epiphany and Trinity seasons take these great works of Christ for us and proclaim them to the Church and all of creation. Why would anyone want to preach a one-year cycle of readings? So that this shape and focus of the Christian faith and life can be embedded in the minds of our hearers. So that the key readings that give us the life of Christ and the life of the Church can be the focal point to our Christian faith and life. If the One-Year series could feed and nourish the Church so well for many centuries before Vatican II, when the Three-Year Lectionary was born, then I maintain that this historic lectionary can still feed us well and bring us home to our gracious and loving Triune God on the Last Day.