

The Lectionary for the Sundays of the Easter Season and Ascension: Critique and Alternative Vision

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Goals and Methodology

This is a critical and creative study of the present lectionary readings for the Easter Season. Among other matters, it proposes an alternative rationale for selecting passages from the Acts of the Apostles. It also suggests a complete set of readings for the Hebrew Scriptures (which at present are not used at all during this season)..

The goals of this project are simple: (a) to identify concerns and questions regarding the lectionary readings for the Easter season, and (b) to imagine concrete ways in which the Easter readings might be improved.

The methodology used may be described as follows:

1. The principles that guided the choice of readings for the Easter season in the present Roman Lectionary and Revised Common Lectionary are set forth. The lectionary readings themselves are then listed.
2. These principles and the individual lectionary readings are studied to reveal concerns and general questions.
3. Principles are formulated to guide the selection of an improved set of readings.
4. Possible alternatives to the present readings that would meet the stated criteria are then imagined and named, together with a rationale.
5. The psalms or psalm passages that follow the first reading have not been considered in this study. Neither have the present second readings, from 1 Peter and 1 John and the book of Revelation.
- 6 It is recognized that the alternatives proposed may themselves be incomplete responses, and not the only possible courses of action.
8. It is also recognized that a case can be made for the retention of individual readings of the present lectionary.
9. My suggestions for re-visiond readings are not viewed as the end of the process, but rather a beginning. Further dialogue and conversation, refinements, evaluation, and reflection are anticipated and invited.

The Present Lectionary Readings

One starting place for this study is the present (1992 Canadian) edition of the *Roman Lectionary* (Lectionary: Sundays and Solemnities. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992). The other is the *Revised Common Lectionary* (prepared by the Consultation on Common Texts) (Winfield BC: Wood Lake Books 1992). These are closely related, and in general the term “lectionary” in the singular is used to refer to these together.

Principles and General Description

The principles and general description that govern the Easter readings in the Roman Lectionary are set out in official Roman Catholic documents.

Lectionary for Mass: Introduction, second edition (1981)

99. ... The gospel reading for the Mass on Easter day is from John on the finding of the empty tomb. There is also, however, the option to use the gospel texts from the Easter Vigil or, when there is an evening Mass on Easter Sunday, to use the account in Luke of the Lord’s appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The first reading is from Acts, which through the Easter season replaces the Old Testament reading. The reading from St. Paul concerns the living out of the paschal mystery in the Church.

100. The gospel readings for the first three Sundays recount the appearances of the risen Christ. The readings about the Good Shepherd are assigned to the Fourth Sunday. On the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Sundays, there are excerpts from the Lord’s discourse and prayer at the last supper.

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

For the reading from the apostles, 1 Peter is in Year A, 1 John in Year B, Revelation in Year C. These are the texts that seem to fit in especially well with the spirit of joyous faith and sure hope proper to this season.

102. For the first reading the solemnity of the Ascension retains the account of the Ascension according to Acts. This text is complemented by the second reading from the apostolic reflections on Christ in exaltation at the right hand of the Father. For the gospel reading, each of the three Years has its own text in accord with the differences in the Synoptic Gospels.

For the Mass on Pentecost itself, in accord with received usage, the account in Acts of the great occurrence on Pentecost is taken as the first reading. The texts from Paul bring out the effect of the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. The gospel reading is a remembrance of Jesus bestowing his Spirit on the disciples on Easter evening; other optional texts describe the action on the Spirit on the disciples and on the Church.

General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar (March 1969)

22. The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better as one “great Sunday.” These above all others are the days for the singing of the Alleluia.

23. The Sundays of this season rank as the paschal Sundays, and after Easter Sunday itself, are called the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Sundays of Easter. The period of fifty sacred days ends on Pentecost Sunday.

24. The first eight days of the Easter season make up the octave of Easter and are celebrated as solemnities of the Lord.

25. On the fortieth day after Easter the Ascension is celebrated, except in places where ... it has been transferred to the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

Revised Common Lectionary: Introduction

25. A final concern in relation to the Easter cycle has to do with the disuse of the Hebrew Scriptures during the season of Easter in the Roman lectionary (a practice mentioned by Augustine in the fifth century). Following the liturgical tradition of the Ambrosian and Hispanic rites in the West and also that of the majority of the Churches in the East, the Roman lectionary of 1969 does not use the Old Testament during the Great Fifty Days from Easter to Pentecost. . . . The Revised Common Lectionary has, however, provided alternate Old Testament reading for those feasts and rubrics which provide for the unvarying use on these festivals of crucial readings from the Acts of the Apostles as the second reading.

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

The Readings

Individual readings are listed below. For Sundays 1-7, the gospels and readings from the Acts of the Apostles are grouped together to facilitate seeing patterns within each group.

The two sets of readings, from the Roman Lectionary and Revised Common Lectionary are similar (especially in the case of the gospels) but may include relatively small differences in versification. (Verse numbers in both cases are based on the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.)

Abbreviations: RL = Roman Lectionary; RCL = Revised Common Lectionary; [alt] = alternative reading (when two readings are presented for the same day). The Sundays are numbered 1-7 (or Easter 1, Easter 2, etc.) The years of the three year cycle are designated A, B, C.

Sundays 1-7

Gospels

1ABC	The empty tomb (RL John 20:1-9 or 20:1-18, RCL 20:1-18)
1A	The empty tomb (RL [alt], RCL [alt] Matthew 28:1-10)
1B	The empty tomb (RL [alt], RCL [alt] Mark 16:1-8)
1C	The empty tomb (RL [alt], RCL [alt] Luke 24:1-12)
1ABC (afternoon/evening)	The disciples recognized Jesus (RL Luke 24:33-35; RCL 24:13-49)
2ABC	Jesus appears on Sunday evening; doubting Thomas (RL, RCL John 20:19-31)
3A	They knew him in the breaking of bread (RL, RCL Luke 24:13-35)
3B	Christ appears and eats with the disciples (RL Luke 24:35-48; RCL 24:36b-48)
3C	Peter, fisherman and shepherd (RL, RCL John 21:1-19)

- 4A Christ the sheepgate (RL, RCL John 10:1-10)
- 4B The true shepherd gives his life for his flock (RL, RCL John 10:11-18)
- 4C Christ gives eternal life to his flock (RL John 10:27-30; RCL 10:22-30)
- 5A Christ the way, the truth and the life (RL John 14:1-12, RCL 14:1-14)
- 5B Dwell in Christ so that you may bear fruit RL, RCL (John 15:1-8)
- 5C The new commandment of love (RL John 13:31-33a, 34-35; RCL 13:31-35)
- 6A If you love me, you will keep my commandments (RL, RCL John 14:15-21)
- 6B The proof of love: to give one's life for one's friends (RL, RCL John 15:9-17)
- 6C The Spirit will teach you everything (RL, RCL [alt] John 14:23-29)
Let not your hearts be troubled (RCL [alt] John 5:1-9)
- 7A Father, glorify your Son (RL, John 17:1-11a; RCL, 17:1-11)
- 7B May they be consecrated by the truth RL (John 17:11b-19; RCL 17:6-19)
- 7C May they be one in us (RL, RCL John 17:20-26)

Acts of the Apostles

- 1ABC We ate and drank with him after he had risen (RL Acts 10:34a, 36-43; RCL [alt] 10:34-43))

- 1A I have loved with an everlasting love (RCL [alt] Jeremiah 31:1-6)
- 1B A feast for all peoples (RCL [alt] Isaiah 25:6-9)
- 1C I am about to create anew (RCL [alt] Isaiah 65:17-25)
- 2A The community of believers (RL Acts 2:42-47)
- Peter: This Jesus God raised up (RCL Acts 2:14a, 22-32)
- 2B One heart and one soul (RL, RCL Acts 4:32-35)
- 2C Growth of the community (RL Acts 5:12-16)
- Peter: God raised up Jesus (RCL Acts 5:27-32)
- 3A Sermon of Peter on the risen Christ (RL Acts 2:14, 22b-28)
- Peter: Repent and be baptized (RCL Acts 2:14a, 36-41)
- 3B Sermon of Peter: Christ died and rose (RL Acts 3:13b-15, 17-19; RCL 3:12-19)
- 3C Sermon of Peter: the apostles are witnesses (RL Acts 5:27b-32, 40b-41)
- Conversion of Paul (Paul is baptized) (RCL Acts 9:1-6 (7-20))
- 4A Sermon of Peter: Jesus is Lord and Christ (RL Acts 2:14a, 36b-41)
- Life of the early community (RCL Acts 2:42-47)
- 4B Sermon of Peter: No salvation but in Christ (RL Acts 4:7-12; RCL 4:5-12)
- 4C Sermon of Paul and Barnabas: Salvation to the ends of the earth (RL Acts 13:14, 43-52)
- Tabitha is restored to life (RCL 9:36-43)
- 5A Seven men chosen who are filled with the Spirit (RL Acts 6:1-7)
- Death of Stephen (RCL Acts 7:55-60)

- 5B Paul is presented to the community by Barnabas (RL Acts 9:26-31)
- Phillip baptizes the Ethiopian (RCL Acts 8:26-40)
- 5C Preaching of Paul, Barnabas; choice of elders (RL Acts 14:21b-27)
- Peter: The Holy Spirit comes upon gentiles (RCL Acts 11:1-18)
- 6A Imposition of hands and gift of the Spirit (RL Acts 8:5-8, 14-17)
- Paul addresses the Athenians (RC:L Acts 17:22-31)
- 6B The Spirit is given even to pagans (RL Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; RCL 10:44-48)
- 6C Leaders chosen for the community (RL Acts 15:1-2, 22-29)
- Paul: The baptism of Lydia (RCL Acts 16:9-15)
- 7A Prayer of the community (RL Acts 1:12-14; RCL Acts 1:6-14)
- 7B Choice of Matthias as a witness to the resurrection (RL Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26; RCL 1:15-17, 21-26)
- 7C Stephen's vision and martyrdom (RL Acts 7:55-60)
- Paul and Silas are freed from prison and the jailor is baptized (RCL 16:16-34)

Ascension

- Acts ABC Account of the Ascension (RL, RCL Acts 1:1-11)
- Gospel A All power is given to Christ (RL Matthew 28:16-20)
- B Christ exalted to the Father's side (RL Mark 16:15-20)
- C Christ was taken up to heaven (RL Luke 24:46-53)
- ABC Christ was taken up to heaven (RCL Luke 24:44-53)

Pentecost

First Reading

ABC	They were filled with the Spirit (RL, Acts 2:1-11; RCL [alt] 2:1-21)
A	Would that all God's people were prophets (RCL [alt] Numbers 11:24-30)
B	Dry bones: You shall live (RCL [alt] Ezekiel 37:1-14)
C	Tower of Babel (RCL [alt] Genesis 11:1-9)

Gospel A

Receive the Spirit (RL, RCL [alt] John 20:19-23)

As yet there was no Spirit (RCL [alt] John 7:37-39)

B	The Spirit of truth will testify (RL John 15:26-27; 16:12-15; RCL 15:26-27; 16:4b-15)
C	The Holy Spirit will teach you everything (RL 14:15-16, 23b-26; RCL [alt] John 14:8-17 (25-27))

Issues, Concerns and Questions

At present, the first reading of each Sunday and solemnity of the Easter season is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. The second reading is taken from 1 John and 1 Peter and the book of Revelation. The third reading is taken from the gospels, most often the gospel according to John. Several issues, concerns and questions have been considered in this study.

Three-Year Cycle of Readings

Certain biblical stories, such as the accounts of Ascension and Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles, are only related once and these have to be repeated each year. Whenever possible, however, I feel that it is preferable to use a cycle of three readings. It therefore seems desirable to identify additional readings for Easter 1 and Easter 2.

Hebrew Scriptures

At present, readings from the Hebrew Scriptures have been omitted from the lectionary for the Easter season, though they are used as first readings the rest of the year. (It has been noted above that the Revised Common Lectionary does provide some alternative readings from the Hebrew Scriptures for Easter Sunday and Pentecost.)

From one perspective the omission of readings from the Hebrew Scriptures might be considered simply “practical”: it provides a relatively smooth way to fit in the Acts of the Apostles, the 1 Peter and 1 John and the book of Revelation. However, the impression might be given (a) that it is not appropriate to use the Hebrew Scriptures during the Easter season, and/or (b) that appropriate readings from the Hebrew Scriptures do not occur or cannot be found.

I reject any implication that the use of the Hebrew Scriptures is inappropriate, and think it desirable to try to identify a full set of such readings for all the Sundays and solemnities of the Easter season.

Acts of the Apostles

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

As indicated above, the Revised Common Lectionary differs significantly from the Roman Lectionary in its use of Acts. In part this is just a matter of the order in which passages are used; but in part it involves the selection of different passages from Acts. The following Table gives a comparative listing of the use of Acts in the Roman Lectionary and Revised Common Lectionary. It also identifies the readings of Acts that are proposed in this study, as set forth below.

Table of Comparative Usage: Acts of the Apostles

Roman Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary	Proposed Here
1:1-11 (Asc-ABC)	1:1-11(Asc-ABC)	1:1-11 (Asc-ABC)
1:12-14 (7A)	1:6-14 (7A)	1:12-14 (7B)
1: 15-17, 20a, 20c-26 (7B)	1:15-17, 21-26 (7B)	
2:1-11 (Pt-ABC)	2:1-21 (Pt-ABC)	2:1-11 (Pt-ABC)
2:14, 22b-28 (3A)	2:14a, 22-32 (2A)	
2:14a, 36b-41 (4A)	2:14a, 36-41 (3A)	
2:42-47 (2A)	2:42-47 (4A)	2:41-47 (7C)
3:13b-15, 17-19 (3B)	3:12-19 (3B)	
4:7-12 (4B)	4:5-12 (4B)	
4:32-35 (2B)	4:32-35 (2B)	4:32-37 (4C)
5:12-16 (2C)		
5:27b-32, 40b-41 (3C)	5:27-32 (2C)	
6:1-7 (5A)		6:1-7 (4B)
7:55-60 (7C)	7:55-60 (5A)	
8:5-8, 14-17 (6A)		8:4-9, 14-17 (2C alt)
	8:26-40 (5B)	8:26-40 (1A)
	9:1-6 (7-20) (3C)	9:10-19 (1B)
9:26-31 (5B)		
	9:36-43 (4C)	9:36-42 (4A)
10:34a, 36-43 (1ABC)	10:34-43 (1ABC)	10:34-39a, 40-43 2A)
10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48 (6B)	10:44-48 (6B)	10:44-48 (5A)
	11:1-18 (5C)	11:1-18 (5A)
		11:19-26 (6C alt)
		11:27-12:5 (3A)
		12:6-17 (3B)
		13:1-5 (6B)
13:14, 43-52 (4C)		
14:21b-27 (5C)		14:21-27 (6C alt)
15:1-2, 22-29 (6C)		15:1-22 (5B)
	16:9-15 (6C)	16:11-15 (1C)
	16:16-34 (7C)	16:16-40 (3C)
	17:22-31 (6A)	17:22-31 (2B)
		18:1-3, 18-19a, 24-27 (5C)
		20:7-12 (7A)
		21:7-14 (6A)
		28:15-16, 23-24, 30- 31 (2C alt)

In effect, the Revised Common Lectionary puts greater emphasis on the apostolic preaching than does the Roman Lectionary; it also includes several women's stories that are not found in the latter. In addition, stories of conversion leading to baptism are included (Paul, the Ethiopian, Lydia); Stephen and Matthias are still included.

Apostolic Church: The focus of the lectionary is more on the apostles than on the apostolic church. It would seem desirable to take a broader and ecclesial approach and show a church in which a wide variety of persons, female and male, are members and have teaching and leadership roles.

Scope of the Acts of the Apostles: Most of the readings of the Roman Lectionary (18 out of 21) now come from only chapters 1-10 of Acts, with three from chapters 13-15. Likewise, most of the readings of the Revised Common Lectionary (17 out of 21) now come from the same chapters 1-10 of Acts; four are taken from chapters 11, 16 and 17. It would seem desirable to include more of Acts, especially as it was important to its author that it conclude with the preaching of the good news in the city of Rome.

Risk, Debate and Change: One of the central and difficult issues in the apostolic church had to do with the inclusion of gentiles. The Acts of the Apostles tells about risks taken in this regard, about disagreements and debates that followed, and about changes in understanding and practice that eventually resulted. The present lectionary readings give a skimpy view of this, at best. It would seem desirable, therefore, to tell more of these important developments in the early church.

Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus: Several of the sermons of Peter and Paul that are included in the lectionary include accusations of Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. For example:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liturgically, these accusations of Jewish responsibility follow soon after the reading of the passion narratives (John on Good Friday; synoptics on Passion Sunday) and seem to repeat and reinforce anti-jewish messages they contain. It would seem desirable to eliminate these passages.

Gospels

The Roman Lectionary appears to offer only a single gospel for Easter Sunday for all three years of the lectionary cycle, inasmuch only John 20:1-9 (in the United States) or John 20:1-18 (in Canada) is printed. Though a rubric, printed in small type, does permit the use of the corresponding synoptic passages (as given for the Easter Vigil for each year), this option clearly is not encouraged. It seems desirable to give all the Easter gospels equal weight, as is done in the Revised Common Lectionary.

It also seems desirable to have a full set of three gospel readings for Easter 2; at present a single passage, John 20:19-31, is used for all three years.

In addition, the Roman Lectionary in the United States entirely omits John 20:11-18, a story of Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ. This passage is used, however, in the Canadian edition of the Roman Lectionary and in the Revised Common Lectionary, but only by assigning John 20:1-18, which actually contains three separate stories. It seems desirable to find another way of including John 20:11-18.

Present Second Readings

The question naturally arises regarding the place of the present second readings in this re-
visioned system of lectionary readings for the Easter Season. This matter is simply not
considered here; these readings have been set aside for the moment. Several alternatives can be
envisioned, including (a) to omit these, leaving three readings (Hebrew Scriptures, Acts, gospel);
(b) to use four readings (Hebrew Scriptures, Acts, epistle/Revelation, gospel); or (c) to omit
Acts, leaving three readings (Hebrew Scriptures, epistle/Revelation, gospel).

Principles: Easter, Baptism, Baptismal Living

The Easter season extends, prolongs, and reinforces the celebration of Easter over a period of eight Sundays, concluding with Pentecost; as well it includes the solemnity or festival of Ascension.

To celebrate Easter is to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the paschal mystery. It is also to celebrate the experience and mystery of baptism through which Christians enter into that paschal mystery. It extends as well to the living out of the paschal mystery and of baptism in the daily lives of Christians: paschal living or baptismal living. The lectionary readings for the Easter season need consistently and effectively to express the meaning of Easter, baptism and baptismal living.

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

1. To live in right relationship with the life-giving and just God of the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures.
2. To love God and neighbor, manifest and support life in the midst of death, and live in and with wisdom.
3. To encounter the Risen Christ in word, eucharist, and community.
4. To experience the peace, unity and abundant life of Christ's friends and disciples in the Holy Spirit and through mutual love.
5. To participate in the community of God's people, which witnesses to the love of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and in which diverse gifts for ministry are exercised by all.
6. To share life in a creative, justice-seeking, hospitable and inclusive community, whose life includes prayer, wisdom, teaching and learning, inquiry, discussion, risk-taking, discernment and change.
7. To live in loving relationships with other persons, especially those in need; this includes doing justice, sharing with others, showing compassion, taking care of the weak, being life-giving persons.
8. To experience and promote respect for Jews and Judaism.

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

Alternatives and Rationale

The present re-visioning suggests readings that express the principle of baptismal living, as well as dealing with concerns and questions that have been made above. In some places two or more alternative readings are suggested.

Gospels

The gospel readings proposed here are mostly those now assigned in the lectionary, except that they are viewed from the perspective of baptismal living. Sundays 1-3 tell about the empty tomb and appearances of the risen Christ; Sundays 4-7 quote from Jesus' teaching and prayer, mostly from chapters 10, 13, 14, 15 and 17 of John's gospel.

I provide a cycle of three readings for Easter 1 and Easter 2, in place of the single readings now assigned (or emphasized). In addition, two other changes and reassignments have been made.

For Easter 1 I follow the Revised Common Lectionary (and the rubrics of the Roman Lectionary) and offer the synoptic resurrection accounts as well as that of John. John 20:1-10 is assigned for year A, Matthew 28:1-10 or Mark 16:1-8 for year B, and Luke 24:1-12 for year C.

For Easter 2 I offer three stories of doubt, questioning and encounter with the risen Christ. One is the one now given in the lectionary, John 20:19-29, doubting Thomas and the risen Christ. The second is the first part of the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-27). The third is the story of Mary Magdalene and the one she mistakes for the gardener (John 20:11-18).

On Easter 3, a small change has been made. The Emmaus passage now tells only of the evening meal (Luke 24:28-35), as the early part of this story (vv. 13-27) has been used on Easter 2.

The readings for Easter 5 and Easter 6 have been partially rearranged. The lectionary readings for Easter 5C and those for Easter 6A and Easter 6B all refer to the new commandment of love; all three of these are now assigned to Easter 6. The reading for Easter 5B is that previously assigned to Easter 6C.

The gospel readings for the Easter season may now be viewed from the perspective of baptismal living.

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

The empty tomb (John 20:1-10)

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

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

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

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

Mary speaks with the risen Christ (John 20:11-18)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15-21)

You are my friends if you do what I command you (John 15:9-17)

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

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

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

That they may be one (John 17:20-26)

Ascension

The gospel readings for the Ascension are taken from the Roman Lectionary; they speak

of the risen and ascended Christ.

All power is given to Christ (Matthew 28:16-20)

Christ is exalted to the Father's side (Mark 16:15-20)

Christ was taken up to heaven (Luke 24:44-53)

Pentecost

The gospel readings for Pentecost are taken from the Roman Lectionary; they speak of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate.

Receive the Spirit (John 20:19-23)

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

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

Acts of the Apostles

The use of passages from the Acts of the Apostles in the present lectionary has been criticized above as being insufficiently paschal and insufficiently ecclesial. Though the Roman Lectionary and the Revised Common Lectionary differ significantly in their choices and arrangements of their readings (see Table on pages 10-12), the focus remains very much on the preaching of the word and on particular church leaders. Acts can easily be understood as the "diary of the early church" that just happens to be read during the Easter season, especially as Acts contains significant accounts of the Ascension and Pentecost.

Instead, in my view, selections from Acts need to be appreciated as *paschal* readings, expressing the basic character of the Easter event. As the present re-visioning views Easter very much in terms of baptismal living, the readings from Acts need to pertain to the living out of baptism in the lives of Christians in the early church and today.

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

I therefore propose that the three readings for Easter Sunday be accounts of baptism: that of the Ethiopian eunuch, that of Paul, and that of Lydia. These accounts also have to do with the issue of inclusion, which was a significant and difficult question in the early church. As stated in Galatians 3:28, there is the matter of male and female, of Jew and Greek, of slave and free, etc. These stories also tell us something about evangelization and the baptizing communities and their ministers.

The decrease in number of passages that quote apostolic preaching also means that accusations of Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus can be eliminated.

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

Easter 1: Baptismal living includes the celebration and remembrance of baptism

The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40)

The baptism of Paul (9:10-19)

The baptism of Lydia (16:11-15)

Easter 2: Baptismal living includes preaching and witnessing near and far and in diverse circumstances.

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

or

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

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

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

Easter 3: Baptismal living includes bearing with hardships and helping those who are treated badly.

Disciples share what they have with those experiencing famine (11:27–12:5)

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

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

Easter 4: Baptismal living includes sharing with and caring for those in need.

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

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

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

Easter 5: Baptismal living includes discussion, debate, change, communal decision-making, and mutual teaching and learning.

Peter took the radical step of baptizing gentiles and was criticized for doing so; he explained to the church of Jerusalem why he had done this (10:44-48; 11:1-18)

Because of continuing criticism regarding the baptism of gentiles, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem and entered into public debate with those who opposed this. James, the leader of the Jerusalem community, is convinced by their arguments (15:1-21)

Paul lived and worked with a couple named Priscilla and Aquilla; later, this couple took

the eloquent and learned Apollos aside and “explained the Way of God to him more accurately.” (18:1-3, 18-19a, 24-27)

Easter 6: Baptismal ministry includes exercising diverse gifts for ministry.

Four women prophets exercised their gifts in Ptolemias (21:7-14)

In Antioch there were many prophets and teachers, from whom Paul and Barnabas were set apart for missionary work in Cyprus (13:1-5)

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

or

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

Easter 7: Baptismal living includes fellowship, teaching, eucharist and prayer.

In Troas, at the breaking of the bread, Paul preached a long time, and the boy Eutyches fell asleep (20:7-12)

The Eleven, together with Mary and other women, devoted themselves to prayer (1:12-14)

The early believers devoted themselves to the apostolic teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers (2:41-47)

Ascension

The reading is the account of the Ascension (Acts 1:11).

Pentecost

The reading is the account of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11).

Hebrew Scriptures

Here I suggest readings from the Hebrew Scriptures for all the Sundays and solemnities of the Easter season and for all three years of the lectionary cycle. In selecting readings I have tried to be respectful of Jews and Judaism and of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. Thus I have tried to avoid hermeneutical principles such as prophecy-fulfillment, discontinuity and supersessionism.

Nevertheless these passages are intended to throw light on baptismal living for Christians today, though their original contexts were of course different. For Sundays 1-7, I have envisioned three separate approaches to the choice of Hebrew Scripture readings that I think are respectful of Jews and Judaism, and also profitable for Christians. These may be named as follows:

- The Life of God's People (year A)
- Life in the Midst of Death (year B)
- Life in and with Holy Wisdom (year C)

Ascension and Pentecost are considered separately.

The Life of God's People

Six passages from the Hebrew Scriptures have been selected that identify different characteristics of the life of God's People. What is said in the Hebrew Scriptures regarding the life of God's people may be understood by Christians as applying also to baptismal living – recognizing that the original context was not Christian. Such passages are therefore proposed for the reading of Sundays 1-7 of the Easter season.

Easter 1A: Baptismal living includes loving God with all one's heart and soul and might, and keeping God's words in one's heart. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

Easter 2A: Baptismal living includes being holy, sharing with the poor, acting justly, and loving one's neighbor. (Leviticus 19:1-4, 9-18)

Easter 3A: Baptismal living includes sharing with the poor, being grateful for the abundance of God's bounty, and sharing again. (Ruth 2:14-18)

Easter 4A: Baptismal living includes caring for the rest of creation, allowing the land to rest, and observing sabbath. (Leviticus 25:1-7)

Easter 5A: Baptismal living includes being open to God's spirit, respecting the spirit in all, and appreciating that God's spirit cannot be monopolized by one or a few. (Numbers 11:24-30)

Easter 6A: Baptismal living includes listening to the voice of the beloved, mutual companionship, admiring the beauty of the beloved, and appreciating the sweetness of mutual love. (Song of Solomon 2:8-17; 4:1, 10-16)

Easter 7A: Baptismal living includes taking care that law and custom exemplify justice, hearing appeals, and being open to making changes for the sake of justice. . (Numbers 27:1-8)

Life in the Midst of Death

The seven stories of life in the midst of death have several implications for baptismal living. Thus:

- they can inspire prayers of thanksgiving, intercession and petition;
- they can inspire our taking action to prevent or diminish the “death” elements of each story;
- they can inspire action related to fostering, promoting and protecting the “life” elements of each story.

Easter 1B: Baptismal living includes praying that there may be life in the midst of family discord and violence; acting to seek reconciliation among estranged family members; and dreaming great dreams. (Joseph is saved from death, Genesis 37:12-28)

Easter 2B: Baptismal living includes praying for relief from tyrannical despots; praying for the well being of children; acting to promote political, social and economic justice; providing leadership in times of oppression; and encouraging hope for those enslaved. (Moses is saved from death, Exodus 1:15–2:10)

Easter 3B: Baptismal living includes praying for health and healing and for all who care for the sick; acting to assure that good health care is available to all; and caring for the elderly. (The widow’s son is restored to life, 1 Kings 17:17-24)

Easter 4B: Baptismal living includes praying for all affected by sexual abuse and violence; acting to provide shelter and help to those who are abused; and living lives of fidelity. (Susanna is saved from death (Susanna/Daniel 13:15-49, 63)

Easter 5B: Baptismal living includes praying for all affected by natural disasters; acting to be generous in providing relief to those in need; and being faithful in proclaiming the good news. (Jonah is saved from the whale (Jonah 1:17--2:1-10)

Easter 6B [alt]: Baptismal living includes praying for all who are persecuted for not serving false gods; acting to promote tolerance and mutual understanding; and caring about those in prison. (The three youth are saved from death, Daniel 3:13-20, 24-26)

Easter 6B [alt]: Baptism living includes praying for all who are punished for defying unjust laws; acting to promote justice in legal and social arenas; and promoting needed changes in society. (Daniel is saved from death, Daniel 6:7, 13-23)

Easter 7B: Baptismal living includes praying for all who lack the basic necessities of life; acting to share possessions with those in need; and extending hospitality and speaking prophetically (The widow and Elijah are saved from death, 1 Kings 17:1-16)

Life In and With Holy Wisdom

The passages having to do with holy wisdom have a number of implications with respect to baptismal living. Thus they may:

- inspire prayers of thanksgiving, praise, intercession and petition;
- lead to acknowledgment, appreciation and the living out of wisdom;
- inspire action to give example of wisdom, reveal wisdom, etc.;
- inspire action to remove obstacles to wisdom.

Easter 1C [alt]: Baptismal living includes recognizing wisdom as liberator from oppression; giving thanks for her guidance; welcoming prophets whom wisdom raises up; and listening to the speech wisdom gives the voiceless. (Wisdom 10:15-21; 11:1-5)

Easter 1C [alt]: Baptismal living includes thanking God for the gift of wisdom; looking for and learning wisdom; appreciating that wisdom gives strength, understanding and discernment; welcoming the wisdom who lives among humankind; and appreciating wisdom in creation. (Baruch 3:9-15, 29-4:4)

Easter 2C [alt]: Baptismal living includes praising God for wisdom; listening for wisdom in the assembly; recognizing the wisdom who dwells among God's people; and marveling at the wisdom of creation. (Sirach 24:1-12)

Easter 2C [alt]: Baptismal living includes prizing wisdom highly; guarding wisdom, for she is life; teaching the way of wisdom; and learning wisdom from children. (Proverbs 4:5-13)

Easter 3C [alt]: Baptismal living includes being thankful for wisdom's unfading radiance; finding wisdom near and far; being vigilant on wisdom's account; and meeting wisdom in every thought. (Wisdom 6:12-16)

Easter 3C [alt]: Baptismal living includes marveling on the wisdom of creation; thinking deeply about the mysteries of creation; thanking God for the rest of creation; enjoying the diversity and intricacy of creation. (Job 38:22-41; 39:1-2, 19-20, 26-27)

Easter 4C : Baptismal living includes loving and seeking wisdom; listening to and obeying wisdom; and remaining faithful to wisdom and inheriting her. (Sir 4:11-18)

Easter 5C: Baptismal living includes teaching wisdom to children; honoring wisdom in the elderly; learning to discern wisdom; and enjoying the rest that wisdom gives. (Sirach 6:18-31)

Easter 6C: Baptismal living includes praying for wisdom; delighting in wisdom; resolving to live

according to wisdom; lamenting our ignorance of wisdom. (Sirach 51:13-21)

Easter 7C [alt]: Baptismal living includes savoring wisdom in all of creation; using one's imagination to thank God; remembering the sweetness of wisdom; being hungry and thirsty for more of wisdom. (Sirach 24:13-21)

Ascension

The readings for the Ascension for all three Sundays speak of holy wisdom.

The joys of wisdom (Proverbs 3:13-18)

or

In praise of wisdom (Wisdom 7:21-30)\

or

The mystery of wisdom (Sirach 1:1-10)

Pentecost

For years A and B, six alternative readings from the Hebrew Scriptures are suggested for Pentecost. Some are proposed by the Revised Common Lectionary; others are appointed by the Roman Lectionary for the Vigil of Pentecost or (in the Canadian edition) for an Extended Vigil of Pentecost.

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

or

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

or

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

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

or

A new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

or

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

For year C, two alternative wisdom readings are provided.

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

or

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

The alternative readings proposed here are set out in lectionary format in a separate document, *Re-visioning the Lectionary for the Easter Season*.