

A Simple Guide to Reading & Interpreting Holy Scripture

Reading with the Church

The Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Church provides a very easy-to-follow way of reading Holy Scripture throughout the year. It is commonly called the Lectionary, which appears in the Prayer Book as “Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year.” The selected readings cover the Bible in almost its entirety, and are arranged for use when the Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer are said. Besides the Psalm(s), there are two lessons per Office, usually one from the Old Testament and a second from the New Testament. They are arranged thus to demonstrate the harmony of the two Testaments and to identify the often very vivid prophetic connection between certain passages, related especially to Christ. The selected passages coincide with the theme of each Christian season, and so convey to us the fullness of God’s revelation to us. Half of the Kalendar Year is dedicated to the story of Jesus, beginning with His Coming in Advent and concluding with His gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year – pages x-xli in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer

Psalms and Lessons for Special Occasions – pages xlii-xliii in the “”

Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days – pages xliv-xlv in the “”

Interpreting with the Church

Drawing partially from the hermeneutic traditions of the ancient Rabbis, Biblical interpreters since the Church’s earliest centuries have suggested that Scripture possesses different levels of meaning. They are called the “Senses of Scripture” and can vary according to genre, authorship, and date of the work. By the High Middle Ages, 4 “Senses of Scripture” came to be accepted as the best means to faithful interpretation, and are explained below:

- i. **LITERAL** – this is the plain, factual meaning of the text according to its grammatical sense and historical context. It might be called the “reasonable” meaning of the text that does not require the illumination of faith or its response.
- ii. **MORAL** – this *tropological* sense discerns the moral lessons that can be derived from the text. Depending on the inherent moral content of the text, this meaning helps to illuminate God’s perspective on good and evil, and asks of our faith an ethical response.
- iii. **ALLEGORICAL** – this *spiritual* sense discerns the symbolic meaning of the words of a text, or a person, action, or situation described in it. This sense helps our faith to identify types and prophecies connecting the Old & New Testaments, especially relating to Christ.
- iv. **ESCHATOLOGICAL** – this *anagogical* sense gives mystical meanings that look to the future, particularly eternity in heaven. This sense illuminates for the eyes of faith our own eternal destiny, and corporately, that of the Church.