

CROSS YEAR

Treasurebook



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Cross Year—Intermediate

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PART I

Psalms

1. A Singing People

Around the world today, music is big business. People sell the words and music of songs. Companies make recordings and sell them by the millions. Orchestras, bands, and singers are paid to perform, and we buy tickets to hear them.

This is all very different from the way people thought about music in the ancient lands of the Near East. For the Hebrews, music grew out of everyday life. For every song there was a reason. No one thought of songs as “products” to be put on the market.

People chanted as they worked. They sang and played instruments to tell stories about war and peace. They sang for their kings and queens. Music was always a part of family parties and the great banquets and feasts.

And God's people put their whole hearts into singing their prayers—raising voices together to express joys and hopes, sorrows and disappointments.

It was widely known that the Hebrews had a rich treasury of music. They sang and played instruments.

- Miriam, the sister of Moses, sang of God's triumph in delivering the Israelites from the Egyptians (*Exodus 15:20-21*).
- Deborah, a prophet, sang with Barak to celebrate victory over the Canaanites (*Judges, ch. 5*).
- Jephthah's daughter met him at his home in Mizpah, playing timbrels and dancing (*Judges 11:34*).
- Women honored the young hero David, after the slaying of the Philistine giant, by singing, dancing, and playing tambourines and other instruments (*I Samuel 18:6-7*).

No one knows just when music became an organized part of Hebrew worship. Probably it was in the time of David, for he was a talented singer, player, and composer. As the ark of the covenant was being moved to a tent of meeting, “David danced before the Lord with all his might,” and a trumpet sounded. (See *II Samuel 6:14-15*.)

Later, in temple worship, the music centered around the sacrifices that were offered to God. The solemn ceremonies were surrounded by appropriate songs and chants.

In the time of King Solomon, music grew much more elaborate—to match the grand temple he had built. Musical groups by the hundreds were employed, both male and female. All the known instruments were used. Leaders felt free to experiment with many ways of singing and chanting.

The hymns we call “psalms” were written over a period of seven or eight hundred years, between the tenth and third or second centuries BCE. The 150 psalms of our Bible are frequently called “the hymnal of the Second Temple,” dating from around 516 BCE, when the temple was rebuilt after the Jews' return from exile in Babylon.

More than seventy of the psalms are associated with David. Many psalms were produced by writers from Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. A strong tradition holds that David wrote the much-loved *Psalms 23*. Those most commonly believed to be genuine psalms of David are *Psalms 18, 29, 88, and 89*.

When the last of the Jerusalem temples was destroyed in 70 CE, the formal music of Hebrew worship ended. Afterward, synagogue worship preserved The Psalms. No rigid rules of performance were needed, for people in each community would choose their ways of chanting and singing.

The Psalms are divided into five “books”:

Book 1, *Psalms 1-41*. Many of these include the heading, “Of David.” The Hebrew name for God in this first book is “Yahweh,” which is mostly translated “Lord” in the NRSV Bible.

Book 2, *Psalms 42-72*, prefers the name “Elohim,” which is usually translated “God,” in the NRSV Bible. Notice, in this book, that *Psalms 53:1-6* is mainly the same as *Psalms 14:1-7* of Book 1, and *Psalms 70:1-5* is like *Psalms 40:13-17*. In Hebrew, an obvious difference in these similar pieces is the use of Elohim in place of Yahweh in Book 2.

Book 3, *Psalms 73-89*, also uses Elohim most of the time.

Book 4, *Psalms 90-106*, begins with a prayer of Moses and includes a wide variety of themes.

Book 5, *Psalms 107-150*, is a miscellaneous collection.

Each of the five books ends with a “doxology,” or verse of praise to God. See the following: *Psalms 41:13, 72:19, 89:52, 106:48*, and all of *Psalms 150*.

From the beginning, the worship of Christians continued in the Jewish tradition. Followers of Jesus Christ began to hear the psalms with new ears. They sang from a whole new point of view. And no matter how difficult their lives in the centuries ahead, they kept on singing the Lord's song.

2. Hebrew Poetry

The ancient Hebrews developed folk songs and music something like our nursery rhymes. For these, the beat and rhythm took on regular patterns. The same was true of the simple chants workers sang outdoors and in their homes. Other songs were military, with calls and signals understood by warriors.

When Samson killed a lion with his bare hands and later returned

to find honey in the animal's carcass, he composed a riddle, found in *Judges 14:14*. It is a little song with a strong beat:

“Out of the eater came something to eat.
Out of the strong came something sweet.”

In the Hebrew language, the lines of The Psalms have their own patterns. These are mostly lost in our English translations. Our newer Bibles do a better job of placing the words on the pages to show the original *stichs* (lines of rhythm pronounced “sticks”). Most stichs have a regular beat, but the Hebrew music does not fall into meters like our own music. It sounds very different to our western ears.

The outstanding characteristic of The Psalms' poetry is parallel structure. We can see it in pairs of lines. Line 2 of the pair may repeat the same idea or theme in different words. Or it may offer some sort of clear contrast with Line 1.

In *The Book of Common Prayer*, the parallels are clear from the asterisks (*) in the printing. A line following an asterisk is usually parallel to the first half-verse.

Here are the main kinds of parallels:

• **Similarity.** The two parts of a verse carry the same general meaning. See, for example, *Psalms 19:1-2* (NRSV):

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the *firmament proclaims* his handiwork.

In *verse 1*, above, “heavens” and “firmament” are similar. Are “telling” and “proclaims” nearly the same?

Day to day *pours forth* speech,
and night to night *declares* knowledge.

In *verse 2*, above, “pours forth” has the same effect as “declares.” Notice the pairing of day and night, and the parallels of speech and knowledge.

Another interesting example is found in the repetitions at the beginning of *Psalms 136:1-3* (NRSV). The first half of each verse is a different way of addressing thanks to God:

Verse 1. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, . . .

Verse 2. O give thanks to the God of gods, . . .

Verse 3. O give thanks to the Lord of lords, . . .

But the second half of each verse is exactly the same: “. . . for his steadfast love endures forever.”

• **Contrast.** The two parts of a verse offer quite different images.

Here are two examples from *Psalms 20:7-8* (NRSV):

Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.

In *verse 7*, above, the contrast is between those who trust in military power and the Israelites who trust in God.

They will *collapse and fall*,
but we shall *rise and stand upright*.

In *verse 8*, above, visualize the difference between a hard fall and standing tall.

The poets were extravagant in using the images of nature to make their points about faithfulness to God and God's law. See, for example, *Psalms 1*, which compares a good person with trees planted by streams, yielding fruit and having healthy leaves. By contrast, a wicked person is like chaff blowing in the wind.

The shortest of the psalms is *Psalms 117:1-2* (NRSV).

Praise the Lord, all you nations!
Extol him, all you peoples!
For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.
Praise the Lord!

The longest hymn is *Psalms 119*. It is divided into sections, each one consisting of eight verses. All the verses of a section, when written in Hebrew, begin with the same letter. In order, the twenty-two sections cover all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In The Psalter of *The Book of Common Prayer*, the words in dark type at the beginning of each section are the names of the letters, from Aleph through Taw.

No standard patterns of stanzas can be clearly defined for the Biblical psalms. Some verses seem too long, others not long enough. It is possible that the writers had in mind a way for musical instruments to fill the spaces and smooth out the rhythm.

In the Biblical texts of The Psalms, the word “Selah” appears now and then at the end of verses. No one knows for sure what it means. Perhaps it was a direction for instruments to play an interlude, or perhaps it was simply a place to pause.

Like all good poetry, The Psalms come to life for us when we hear them read aloud or sung. Then the parallels stand out more clearly, especially if we use the *antiphonal* approach. The word “antiphon” means “a response.” We can choose among three possible ways to produce this effect in our churches' services:

1. A reader or cantor (chanter) will do the psalm verses, singly or in groupings. The people respond each time with the same line.

2. A single reader or a choir will do a whole verse or half-verse, followed by congregational reading or singing of the next verse or half-verse. This is usually called simply “responsive reading.”

3. The congregation divides into two groups, as in the case of the people seated on right and left sides of a church nave. One side begins with a verse or half-verse, and the second side responds with the next.

3. Hymns of History

The history of God's people is celebrated in The Psalms, although not in an orderly way. Sometimes the names of people and places will send us to other books of the Bible to discover why the Hebrews remembered them in song.

We cannot always be sure about the events that are mentioned in psalms. Scholars believe that some of the poetry came from the northern kingdom of Israel, which disappeared toward the end of the eighth century BCE. These older psalms were preserved by Judah, the southern kingdom.

It is possible that *Psalms 24:7-10* was sung when the ark of the covenant was brought from Shiloh and installed with ceremony in Solomon's temple.

A good illustration of a hymn of history is *Psalms 78*. It describes God's mighty work through the centuries, in defeating the people's enemies and keeping them safe. It also confesses their sins and failure to obey God's law. Here is an outline of this long poem:

Verses 1-8. Introduction.

Verses 9-31. The Israelites were disobedient, but they experienced great miracles in their desert wandering.

Verses 32-39. The people of Israel were still not loyal in their faith, but God forgave them.

Verses 40-55. The Exodus from Egypt followed great plagues.

Verses 56-64. The Philistines were conquered, but Israel suffered much.

Verses 65-72. God came into the scene as David was named the warrior leader and king.

Imagine the people of the temple singing this great song and remembering the stories that had been passed down to them by their ancestors. It would be something like singing a long ballad that told about our nation's history, from the time of the first colonies to the revolution, and on through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. We would not sing the dates or the names of all the presidents and leaders. But the verses would help us to recall the times of greatness and also the periods of suffering and trouble.

4. Offering Praise

Our word “praise” comes from the same Latin root as “price.” When we praise another, we are recognizing that person's real worth. Or when we praise someone's good work or creativity, we are showing our appreciation for a valuable contribution.

It is the same with praise of God. In our prayers and hymns, we express our heartfelt appreciation for God's goodness in making, saving, and watching over people and nature. God's worth is matchless.

The psalmists were experts in the art of praise. They poured out their hearts to express their joy in the presence of God who created everything. One of the Hebrew words we translate as praise means “to stretch forth one's hands.” It seems natural to raise arms and look upward when attempting to tell God our deepest feelings.

In The Psalms we can identify hymns of praise under several headings, such as the following:

Joyful Songs. Several psalms seem to be overflowing with ecstatic happiness. Examples of these are *Psalms, 98, 100, 117, and 150*. Musical instruments and voices combine to praise God.

Nature's Voices. A number of psalms declare that the whole of nature is joining in praise to the Creator. See *Psalms 65, 96, 104, and 148*.

The structure of *Psalms 104* is especially interesting. It is a song of praise to God for seven wonders of nature. Here is a way to outline its stanzas:

Introductory praise to Yahweh—*verse 1*.

First wonder, the sky—*verses 2-4*.

It is like a garment or a tent.

Second wonder, the earth—*verses 5-9*.

God has laid it on firm foundations.

Third wonder, water—*verses 10-13*.

Springs and rainfall give drink to all living creatures.

Fourth wonder, vegetation—*verses 14-18*.

Grass and trees are provided in abundance.

Fifth wonder, the moon and the sun—*verses 19-23*.

They give us night and day to order the daily living of people and animals.

Sixth wonder, the sea—*verses 24-26*.

It is filled with creeping things and the great monster, Leviathan.

Seventh wonder, the gift of life itself—*verses 27-30*.

God's spirit breathes life into all of creation.

Closing stanza of praise, *verses 31-35*. The psalmist sings his heart out in adoration of God.

Praise for God's Power. The main theme in some psalms of praise is God's kingly rule and strength. God presides over the nations and brings victories in battle. God performs awesome deeds and delivers the chosen people from bondage. God continues to watch over Israel and forgives her sins. Among these hymns are *Psalms 33, 47, 67, 89:1-18, 92, 111, 135, 145, 147, and 149.*

Praise for God's Justice. In *Psalms 113*, God is high and exalted, but reaches to the lowly in compassion. In *Psalms 146*, God is praised for justice and for freeing prisoners.

Praise for God in the Temple. The poet who wrote *Psalms 84* rejoiced in the “courts of the Lord.” It was good to be in the temple and to rejoice in the presence of God.

The Bible's psalms of praise have inspired Christian hymn writers. Here are some outstanding examples from *The Hymnal 1982*:

Psalms 84—Hymn 517, “How lovely is thy dwelling place.” The first part of this hymn was written in the seventeenth century. Stanzas 3-4 are by a modern writer.

Psalms 98—Hymn 413, “New songs of celebration render.” This is a modern hymn set to a sixteenth century tune.

Psalms 100—Hymns 377 and 378, “All people that on earth do dwell.” Called “Old Hundredth,” the music is the same as our familiar Doxology—“Praise God from whom all blessings flow”. This is one of the best-loved hymns of all time. Hymn 391, “Before the Lord's eternal throne,” by Isaac Watts, is another paraphrase of the same psalm.

Psalms 117—Hymn 380, “From all that dwell below the skies.” Also sung to Old Hundredth, the hymn paraphrases the Bible's shortest psalm.

Psalms 145:1-12—Hymn 414, “God, my King, thy might confessing.” The stately language glorifies the supreme power of God.

Psalms 148—Hymn 373, “Praise the Lord! ye heavens adore him.” Images of nature are used to express the glory of God.

Psalms 148, 150—Hymn 432, “O praise ye the Lord!” Both of the psalms are incorporated in this hymn. The wonders of nature and the beauty of music are joined in praise to God.

5. Giving Thanks

It is not possible to draw a sharp line separating praise and thanksgiving. They belong together.

Songs of praise surely include the spirit of thankfulness for all that God has done. But when we “give thanks,” we do more than describe the greatness of God and God's deeds. To thank is also to give something back—to make a gift of gratitude.

So it is not surprising that the psalms—in all their richly varied

moods—are sprinkled with verses that say thank you to the Lord. The nation of Israel gives thanks for God's mighty deeds. Individual psalmists also shout out their thanks for special favors in times of trouble and testing, and in moments of triumph and joy.

Following are some typical lines related to thanksgiving:

“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High” (*Psalms 50:14* NRSV). This is one of the Offertory Sentences in *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 376 (in a slightly different translation).

“I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving” (*Psalms 69:30* NRSV).

“O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples” (*Psalms 105:1* NRSV).

“Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever” (*Psalms 106:1; 107:1* NRSV).

“I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord” (*Psalms 116:17* NRSV).

“Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre” (*Psalms 147:7* NRSV).

A prime example of a congregational song of thanks is *Psalms 95:1-7*, which we also know as the Venite, of Morning Prayer, *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 44 and 82. (Venite is the Latin word for “O come.”) These lines have been sung at the Daily Office from ancient times until the present. The verses form three stanzas: *Verses 1-2*, the invitation to give thanks with “joyful noise”; *verses 3-5*, describing the greatness of God who possesses the whole earth; *verses 6-7*, a call to worship and obedience to God, our shepherd.

Psalms 100 combines praise and thanksgiving in *v. 4* (NRSV): “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.” This is the Jubilate, also included in Morning Prayer. (Jubilate is Latin for “rejoice.”)

A much longer thanksgiving song opens Book 5 of The Psalms. The text of *Psalms 107* is a series of touching portraits showing God's people facing trouble and danger.

Stanza 1 (*verses 1-3*) is a general call to thank God for steadfast love and redemption.

Stanza 2 (*verses 4-9*) tells about desert wanderers who fainted from hunger and thirst. They were led to a town and saved.

Stanza 3 (*verses 10-16*) describes people imprisoned and sentenced to hard labor. God set them free.

Stanza 4 (*verses 17-22*) speaks of people sick in their sin, unable to eat, and crying. God healed them and saved them from being destroyed.

Stanza 5 (*verses 23-32*) is two verses longer. It is the story of people who went out on the high seas in ships and struggled mightily in a terrifying storm. God brought them safely to

their destination.

Repeated in each of these stanzas in the NRSV are the lines: “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.”

The psalm ends with two quite different stanzas (*verses 33-38* and *39-43*) that praise God for nature's productivity and also for bringing justice in the lives of the needy. The closing verse seems to hark back to the opening stanza's praise for God's “steadfast love.”

The songs of thanksgiving in *The Hymnal 1982* are not all paraphrases of psalm texts, such as the examples given previously in this Treasurebook. But these Christian hymns that praise God for abundant harvests and tender care were perhaps inspired by The Psalms' rich expressions of gratitude and can be considered our “psalms” of praise:

“Praise to God, immortal praise” (Hymn 288).

“Come, ye thankful people, come” (Hymn 290).

“Now thank we all our God” (Hymns 396, 397).

“We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing” (Hymn 433).

“We plow the fields, and scatter” (Hymn 291).

6. Royal Psalms

Sometimes a poet will be asked to compose verses for an inauguration or coronation. And in an earlier time in American history, other special occasions prompted the national “poet laureate” to prepare a poem of commemoration.

In a similar way, ancient Hebrew psalmists wrote hymns to be sung when a king was crowned—or when he was married, or as a prayer at a critical time in the nation's life.

We call these compositions “royal psalms.” They are among the oldest of The Psalms, dating to the time when Israel was a united kingdom. Miraculously, they survived even the period of the exile and were sung once again after Judah's return from Babylon.

Psalm 2 was composed for a coronation. It shares the reactions of God and of the king to a local rebellion. The end promises punishment to the rebels and a reward for the obedient.

Psalm 18 is a royal song of thanksgiving probably written by David. With only minor variations, this song appears in *II Samuel 22*.

Psalm 20 begins with a congregation's prayer for their king as he goes off to battle (*verses 2-6*). The answer to the prayer is announced by a priest or prophet (*verses 7-10*).

Psalm 21 is a prayer of thanksgiving for the royal victory prayed for in *Psalm 20*. Yahweh fought alongside the king, bringing great success in battle.

Psalm 45 is a song that praises a king and his bride at their

wedding. It begins with the virtues of the king, then tells the queen to be attentive to her husband. Included is a description of her wardrobe and her processional entrance into the palace.

Psalm 72 was written for the coronation of a king, possibly for Solomon.

Psalm 101 could have been a king's proclamation on the day he took the throne. Or it may be simply a song sharing the promises of an ideal king.

Psalm 110 was probably written to celebrate a military victory.

Psalm 132 is believed to have been written in the tenth century BCE to be sung at the feast when the ark of the covenant was carried in procession to Jerusalem—under the direction of King David. See *II Samuel 6:12-19*. In *verses 1-5*, David promises to make a home for God in Jerusalem. The story of the procession and prayers asking God's blessing are given in *verses 6-10*. The last stanza, *verses 11-18* is the promise of the Lord to be with David and his descendants on the throne.

Psalm 144:1-11 is a royal hymn of thanksgiving, with a prayer for victory over all foes. At the end, the psalmist promises to sing and play a harp for God as a way of giving thanks.

In the later history of the people of Judah, their hopes were centered more and more on the coming of a Messiah who would fulfill all their hopes for a return to the glory of the days of King David. As the people sang the royal psalms, they began to think of them as descriptions of the Savior who was to come.

Jewish zealots who resisted the Romans were inspired by these royal psalms.

But Christians, too, have drawn inspiration from these songs. Many of the verses seemed to them to proclaim what had come to pass in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It was Jesus who was the victorious and glorious “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

7. Cries of Lament

When we feel terrible and need to cry, where do we go? Who listens?

We can turn to loving members of our family, and to trusted friends. People have done that in every generation. But we can also speak to God about what bothers us.

For thousands of years, people have been singing and praying to God by using The Psalms of the Bible. We do it because these ancient hymns are true to life—not just for Hebrews of long ago but for us today as well.

When we are sad, depressed, or just plain sick, we discover psalmists who felt the same way. When we are miserable because we are guilty, some of the psalms confess the very same state of being.

When we have been treated unfairly, or when our friends desert us, we can read the Bible's psalms and know that we are not alone.

To put it another way, the psalmists are thoroughly honest. They pour out their very hearts to God. We know their sorrow and anguish. We can see their tears. We understand when they are hurt and angry.

About a third of The Psalms are what we call “laments.” Some of these are the voice of the whole worshiping community. Many others express deep, personal emotions—including pleas for forgiveness from sin.

To lament is to show grief, to regret, to complain, and even to wail. Psalms of lament can be general or quite specific and intense. They can be spoken at any time, at night or in daylight, indoors or outside, in prison, or during a storm. We can pray them not only for ourselves but also for our friends.

When we express a lament to God, we are saying that we want to be free from cruelties and unjust dealings. We also hunger for good health, strength, and freedom. And we want to enjoy God's grace and salvation until the day we die.

The verses of a psalm of lament tend to follow a typical pattern:

- Calling humbly on the name of God.
- Describing just what is needed.
- Praying for help.
- Vowing to be faithful to God.
- Expressing hope for a good reply from God.
- Stating any help God has already given.

Following is a list of *laments from individuals*, and some of their themes:

Bodily sickness—*Psalms 6, 38, 88*. A longer example is *Psalms 102*, with its vivid descriptions of suffering. The psalmist cries, “My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. Because of my groaning my bones cling to my skin” (*verses 4-5 NRSV*).

Notice especially the tender words at the beginning: “Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress” (*verses 1-2a NRSV*). And the confident line spoken to God at the end: “The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence” (*verse 28 NRSV*).

Possible death—*Psalms 69*. This psalmist paints a word picture of his desperate situation. He is sinking, he is weary from crying, and he is resentful of his many enemies who have trapped him. He wants them to be punished and destroyed.

Why does he wish to be saved from dying? So that he can “. . . praise the name of God with a song” (*verse 30 NRSV*).

Sin—*Psalms 51*. Expressions in this earnest prayer for forgiveness

are used often in the services of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Notice especially:

“Have mercy” (*verse 1 NRSV*).

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (*verses 10-11 NRSV*).

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise” (*verse 15 NRSV*).

Injustice—*Psalms 35*. This psalmist is the innocent victim of persecution. He has no sympathy for the “malicious witnesses” who have risen against him (*verse 11 NRSV*). He has worn sackcloth, fasted, and bowed down in mourning. Still, his enemies have rejoiced in his suffering. He wants justice, and if God answers his prayer, he will tell everyone “all day long.”

Abandonment—*Psalms 22, 88*. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (*Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46*). He was using the words of *Psalms 22:1* (*NRSV*).

Thirst for God—*Psalms 42, 43, 84*. It is likely that all three of these psalms were written by a sensitive musician who was suffering exile in Babylon. He recalls the joyful processions into the temple from which he is now absent. But he has hope that he will someday play his harp there again.

It is widely believed that *Psalms 42-43* are meant to be one psalm. The same refrain is used in both: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, . . . ?” (*verses 5 and 5 NRSV*).

Penitence—*Psalms 130*. The writer pleads tenderly for forgiveness. He turns to the Lord “. . . who will redeem Israel . . .” (*verse 8 NRSV*).

National laments speak of war, captivity, famine, plague, and other dangers. Examples are *Psalms 44, 74, 79, 80, 90* and *Psalms 137*.

In *Psalms 137*, a servant of God from among the exiles in Babylon described how it felt to be taunted by tormentors who said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could they sing when they were weeping with sorrow? The psalmist writes plaintively:

How could we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy. (*Verses 4-6 NRSV*)

In later generations, the Hebrew hymns of lament could be sung by the whole congregation. Everyone would remember the sad days of their people's history.

Remember, too, the Jewish people who endured the terrible holocaust of World War II. They surely recalled psalms of lament in their own hours of final torment. They would die still believing in the “steadfast love of the Lord.”

8. Wisdom

A long time before the Hebrew faith began, wise men of Babylonia, Edom, and Egypt thought about the meaning of life. Mostly they decided that goodness brought rewards and wrong acts brought punishment.

Wise men from among the Hebrews held a similar point of view. They spoke of righteousness or “fear of the Lord” as the way to gain prosperity. Bad behavior, they said, would lead to misfortune or sudden death.

This line of thinking can be found in the following: *Psalms 1, 14 (53), 34, 73, 94, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, 139, and 144.*

In *Psalms 73*, the writer begins by saying that he has faith in God's goodness toward the “pure in heart.” He confesses that he has envied wicked people who enjoy prosperity and receive praise from others. He observes that they are arrogant. They doubt that God knows or cares what they do. Still, they grow richer!

So the psalmist wonders whether it means nothing that he himself has lived an innocent life and kept his heart “clean.” Why must he suffer troubles while the wicked enjoy life?

But then he goes to the sanctuary of God and feels ashamed of himself. He has been stupid. He realizes that he is totally dependent on God. He ends his prayer:

Indeed, those who are far from you will perish;
you put an end to those who are false to you.
But for me it is good to be near God.
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
to tell of all your works. (*verses 27-28 NRSV*)

The “wisdom” concept requires the psalmist to affirm that righteousness will win in the end. This same point is made many times in other wisdom psalms.

The main Old Testament books of wisdom are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Following are notes about each of these:

Proverbs. Over time, every nation and culture develops short sayings that are learned and passed along as wisdom. For example, in America, Benjamin Franklin wrote a line that has been memorized in every generation: “A penny saved is a penny earned.”

The greatest number of short, wise sayings in the Bible are found in the book of Proverbs. It is composed of eight collections of verses finally put together around three hundred years before Christ. The name of King Solomon, son of David, is attached to all of these. Most scholars believe he wrote only some of the proverbs.

Typical proverbs are short statements, frequently in the form of poems (like jingles). Some are humorous, and some are sarcastic. Proverbs can touch on everyday issues—business, family relationships, vice and virtue, poverty and riches, laughter and sorrow. Here are several sections:

A father teaches his children—*Proverbs 4:1-27*. The best goal in life is to pursue wisdom and true insight.

An ant is wise—*Proverbs 6:6-11*. It works hard during the summer and gathers a harvest. It needs no officer or ruler.

Strong drink is evil—*Proverbs 23:29-35*. The writer asks, “Who has redness of the eyes? Those who linger late over wine, . . .” (*verses 29b-30a*).

Long ago in this country, girls being taught to use needle and thread would do “samplers” for framing. Proverbs was a good source of verses to be cross-stitched in linen. We can picture young hands producing this sampler:

A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.
—*Proverbs 15:1*

Ecclesiastes. We do not know who wrote this book in the Hebrew Scriptures. Many people believe it is the work of Solomon, but scholars have dated it much later.

The writer calls himself “the Teacher (Preacher in RSV).” Certainly he is not like persons who teach today. The book has been called “the strangest” in the Old Testament. Some of its teaching appears quite out of place, and many verses and paragraphs seem to disagree with one another. Could it be simply notes written by a person who had different moods—ups and downs?

Famous lines in *Ecclesiastes 3:1-8* remind us that life is filled with contrasts. For everything there is a “time” or “season.”

But the Teacher is mainly cynical. He has the general idea that nothing has meaning. All is “vanity” (hollow and useless). He looks at the world around him, and everything seems to be “in vain”—learning, pleasure, wealth, wisdom, and all else.

It seems likely that a later editor tacked on some wise words at the end: “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole

duty of everyone” (*Ecclesiastes 12:13b*).

Job. This book is about the puzzling question, Why do good people suffer? The common wisdom held that the righteous are free of trouble, and bad things happen to the wicked. But Job committed no serious sin. Still, he lost his health, his family, and all his possessions. The writer concludes that it is our duty to trust God, even when we cannot make sense of suffering that comes our way.

Here is an outline of excerpts from Job that give the skeleton of the story:

1. Job, a good and prosperous man, suffered misfortune. Three friends visited, and each one spoke three times to Job, trying to explain his condition. Job patiently replied to all the speeches. (*Chapters 1:1-2:13.*)

2. Job declared he was innocent of any sin that would cause him to suffer so much. (*Chapter 31:1-40.*)

3. God spoke to Job. Job sees the greatness of God in the world of nature. (*Chapter 38:1-27.*)

4. Job replied to the Lord. He was penitent and trusting. (*Chapters 40:3-5; 42:1-6.*)

5. Job was restored. (*Chapter 42:7-17.*)

The Song of Solomon is a long and beautiful love poem—a dialogue between a man and a woman. It does not fall into any of the major categories such as history, psalms or wisdom literature. It stands in the Bible between Ecclesiastes and Isaiah, the first book of the prophets.

The Bible itself is our greatest book of treasures. Each time we read from it, we see and hear something new. That is why we can call it truly “the Word of God.”

PART II

God's Reign

1. The Future

We can all name many things that are wrong in the world around us. People hate and hurt others. Wars are fought. Some persons face pain and sorrow each day. Men, women, and children are hungry and homeless. The resources of this beautiful earth are polluted and wasted.

How we wish these conditions could be changed!

In every generation, we dream of a better future for ourselves and our descendants.

That is why we pray the Lord's Prayer. Jesus taught us to say:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.
—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 364

Two words are repeated in this prayer—"heaven" and "kingdom." We are speaking to God who is like a tender parent. In God's heaven are perfect love and justice. All is good.

We dare to pray that God will make our life on earth like the life of heaven. In such a world, God will reign (rule). People will share their daily bread. People will forgive one another. People will be saved from trials and evil.

The future rule of God over all human affairs is called God's "kingdom." God is not like earthly kings and leaders, for God is able to blot out sin and evil—and to change human hearts.

Where did these ideas of the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, come from?

In the centuries following David's time, the history of Israel and Judah was marked by ups and downs. For a time, the people would turn toward the rule of God, then they would rebel and turn away.

What could they hope for as they suffered the consequences of their sins?

Prophets arose to foretell a day when God would establish a kingly reign on earth that surpassed the glory of King David. It had been David who ruled over the tribes of Israel in unity. The people linked the name of David with the great temple in Jerusalem, completed by his son, Solomon. The prophets declared that a “remnant” of the faithful would always exist. And one day, the Messiah of God would bring peace and justice. All wrongs would be set right. The people would be obedient to the Lord.

The first prophet named Isaiah wrote:

They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.
—*Isaiah 11:9*

Jeremiah foresaw a brighter future for his suffering people:

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.”
—*Jeremiah 31:10*

Amos, who denounced the people for their many sins, ended his prophecy with hope-filled words from God:

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined
cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
I will plant them upon their land,
and they shall never again be plucked up
out of the land that I have given them,
says the Lord your God.
—*Amos 9:14-15*

A later Isaiah declared:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,

and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
—*Isaiah 60:1-3*

When people heard Jesus teaching and saw his healings and miracles, they knew that he must be their long-awaited Messiah. He would be the one to restore the fortunes of God's people—the one of whom the prophets had spoken long years ago!

Jesus came to announce the kingdom of God. He did not define it, but all his teaching focused on it. Typically, he would begin a parable, “The kingdom of heaven is like . . . (a sower going out to sow; a woman seeking a lost coin; a mustard seed).”

To be sure, the followers of Jesus were slow to understand that he came to bring an even greater reign of God than they could conceive. By his suffering and death on the cross, he triumphed over both sin and death. His weakness became the strength of God in the world.

The Church has always understood that the risen Christ is himself the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Our future is in the hands of God and God's Son, Jesus Christ. He is “the way, the truth, and the life.” His kingdom shall have no end.

2. Now But Not Yet

When Jesus was about thirty years old, his cousin, John, began a preaching mission. This unusual man attracted attention partly because of his appearance and style of life. He lived in the desert wilderness. His clothing was made of camel's hair, and he wore a leather belt. His diet was locusts and wild honey.

John spoke in the manner of the Hebrew prophets. He scolded his listeners, even calling them a “brood of vipers.” He said that they would be destroyed if they did not “bear good fruit” in their lives.

He called upon everyone to “repent,” which means to turn around. When people heeded his message, he baptized them with water in the River Jordan as a sign of their penitence.

According to the first Gospel, John's sermons began, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (*Matthew 3:2*).

All four Gospel writers connected John the Baptist's ministry with these words from *Isaiah 40:3*:

A voice cries out:
“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.”

John was the forerunner for Jesus. His ministry faded into the background as Jesus began his own work of teaching, preaching, and healing.

Jesus cared deeply for John. Although he had committed no sin

and did not need to repent, he submitted to John's baptism. It was then that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. Immediately, he went into the wilderness to be alone and ponder what would be required of him as God's Messiah. He was tempted by Satan to distort his mission and seek worldly acclaim. Three times he said a firm no.

According to Luke's Gospel, Jesus visited the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, just after he returned from his days in the desert. He read aloud from the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”
—*Luke 4:18-19*

Then Jesus stunned his hearers by saying, “Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (*verse 21*).

Matthew reports that Jesus, when he learned that John had been arrested, left Nazareth and went to Capernaum by the sea. There he, too, began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (*Matthew 4:17*).

Each year, as Advent arrives, we recall these events. The Scriptures and prayers in our worship during the four weeks before Christmas Day remind us to examine our own lives and prepare for the coming of Christ. We call this season “penitential” from the word “repent.” It is a time to consider our own citizenship in the kingdom of God. Are we loving toward God and our neighbors?

In Advent, we focus on two truths:

- The kingdom of God has come.
- The kingdom of God will come.

How can both be true at the same time?

Surely we cannot doubt that Jesus brought healing and hope. He taught us how to love God and our neighbors. He offered forgiveness of sins to all who repent and turn to God. All these joyful benefits from Jesus Christ are ours, right now. The kingdom of heaven has come. It is near when we commit ourselves to Christ as Savior.

Still, the world is troubled by evil, sin, selfishness, and sickness of body and spirit. So long as these ills and wrongs continue, the kingdom of heaven has not yet come. It will be ours when Christ “comes again.”

The kingdom of God broke into the human scene in Jesus Christ. The battle with sin and death was won, our life in the world still goes on. At a time known only to God, everyone will acknowledge Christ as Lord. The kingdom will be fully revealed to all.

3. Kingdom in the Gospels

The word “gospel” means good news. And if we study the four Gospels of the New Testament, we discover quite soon that the good news Jesus came to share with us all is “the kingdom.”

- The Gospel of *Mark* was the first to be written. The writer saw the kingdom of God as a special relationship between God and the faithful. It is a gift to those whom God has called—a “secret” not understood by persons outside the circle of Christ's disciples. (See *Mark 4:11*.)

The first half of Mark focuses on stories of Jesus' healing and preaching. The writer shares nothing about Jesus' birth and upbringing.

The second half of this Gospel shows Jesus preparing his disciples to suffer in the future as Jesus himself suffers and dies. The resurrection story comes as a surprise, a joyful ending.

- *Matthew* used the term “kingdom” more often than the other Gospel writers. But he spoke of “the kingdom of God” only twice. In over fifty other references, Matthew used “the kingdom of heaven.” His purpose was to convince his fellow Jews that Jesus was indeed the expected Messiah.

To appeal to Jewish readers, he began with a genealogy linking Jesus to Hebrew ancestors. Joseph was a direct descendant from King David. Matthew tells us that an angel visited Joseph to share the news that the Virgin Mary would bear a son to be named Jesus.

The only reference to Jesus' infancy in Matthew's Gospel is the story of the Wise Men who came from other Eastern nations to worship the newborn “king of the Jews.” Throughout his Gospel, he quoted from the Old Testament to interpret Jesus' life and ministry.

In Matthew, we can see a strong conflict of kingdoms: the kingdom of heaven vs. the kingdom of “this age” that rejects Christ's ministry. This Gospel pronounces harsh judgment on all who oppose the kingdom of heaven.

- *Luke* wrote his Gospel as a storyteller. He shared details found nowhere else. Luke's account of Jesus' Nativity tells us about the crowded inn, the baby in the manger, the shepherds in the field, and the angels' song. Only from Luke do we hear about Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve (*chapter 2*). And in Luke are the much-loved parables of the Prodigal Son (*chapter 15*) and the Good Samaritan (*chapter 10*).

Luke's many references to “the kingdom of God” are quotations from Jesus, the rabbi who moved through the countryside to teach and heal.

- The Gospel of *John*, believed to have been written much later than the others, includes only one verse about the kingdom of God

(*chapter 3:5*). Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus, a Jewish teacher who had come to visit him in the night.

John's Gospel offers no hints about Jesus' childhood. Jesus' coming into the world is “the Word” that became “flesh” (*chapter 1*). This is the Gospel with Jesus' well-known “I am . . .” statements. He spoke of himself as the shepherd, the door, the vine, and the way.

4. Messiah

Have you seen pictures or heard of a *basilica*? Or perhaps visited one?

The word “basilica” comes from a Greek word meaning “king.” Buildings known as basilicas are great, domed churches with columns inside that divide the space into a center nave and two side areas. Like Anglican and Episcopal cathedrals, they are magnificent structures created by Orthodox and Catholic bodies. As their name suggests, they are built to the glory of Christ the King. They proclaim the reign of God.

Worshippers who enter a basilica sense at once the majesty of God that inspired the construction. They are drawn into prayer to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Strangers to the Christian faith might visit such a place and wonder about the King. Where did he come from?

It would be unlikely that they would even imagine the humble beginnings of Jesus. How surprised they would be to hear the story of a baby born in a Bethlehem manger, to a couple from Nazareth in Galilee. The mother, Mary, was a gentle young woman married to a carpenter named Joseph. They were loyal in their Jewish faith.

When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple in Jerusalem—a great house of prayer that attracted crowds during special seasons of the year. This visit was traditional for a new mother. She must observe Jewish custom and seek prayers for her spiritual cleansing following childbirth.

Probably they could not afford to bring a sheep as a sacrifice. Instead they brought two birds—turtledoves or pigeons.

While the Holy Family were in the temple, they met two unusual figures.

The first was Simeon, a man who looked forward to the day when God's Messiah would come. Led into the temple by the Holy Spirit, Simeon gazed at the baby and knew that here was the very One he had hoped to see before his life ended. Simeon took the baby into his arms and praised God in these precious words:

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for mine eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the
presence of all peoples,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”
—*Luke 2:29-32*

This prayer is called the Song of Simeon and is also known as the *Nunc dimittis* (Latin for “now depart”).

The second person to recognize Jesus as Messiah was an eighty-four-year-old woman named Anna. She came day and night to pray in the temple. When she saw the baby Jesus, she spoke of the child as the one who would redeem (save) the people of Israel.

Joseph and Mary took their child home and lovingly provided him with a good upbringing. He was instructed in the Hebrew tradition. And, as Luke puts it, “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (*Luke 2:40*).

From so simple an origin, Jesus was prepared to undertake his saving ministry as Messiah, King, and Suffering Servant of God.

5. New Life

Older adults frequently recall being asked to memorize Bible verses when they were young pupils in Sunday School. One verse that almost everyone learned was sometimes called a summary of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the words of Jesus:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

—*John 3:16*

The Gospel of John contains many of Jesus' sayings about eternal or everlasting “life.” We get the impression from this later Gospel that the kingdom of God *is* life—not just breathing and moving about physically but a spiritual existence. It begins when we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior—and it continues forever. Not even death interrupts the life of the spirit.

- To maintain our physical life, we need food and water. Jesus called himself “the bread of life” (*John 6:35*). And he told a Samaritan woman that he could give her “living water” so that she would never be thirsty again (*John 4:10-15*). He is the source of the spiritual nourishment needed for life with God.

- When Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, was reported to be dead, Jesus went to their home. Before raising Lazarus from the grave, Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (*John 11:25-26*).

- As Jesus prepared his disciples for his coming death on the cross, they were perplexed and asked him to explain more fully. “Thomas

said to him, `Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, `I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (*John 14:5-6*).

In an unusual visit with a Jewish leader, Jesus spoke about the way to eternal life. (See *John 3:1-21*.)

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a teacher who interpreted the faith of Israel. During a Passover festival in Jerusalem, he was impressed by Jesus' deeds of power and his teaching. He was attracting many followers.

Nicodemus decided to approach this unusual rabbi himself. Apparently to avoid being seen by others, he went to Jesus in the night.

He began by observing that Jesus must indeed be a man from God.

Jesus replied that "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

This saying puzzled Nicodemus greatly. What could Jesus mean? Are we born more than once?

Jesus was challenging his visitor to think and feel more deeply. True membership in the kingdom of God requires that we be "born of the Spirit." We need to undergo life-changing spiritual rebirth.

When Nicodemus expressed puzzlement, Jesus chided him for not understanding and then spoke the famous words of *John 3:16*, above.

The story of Nicodemus reminds us of the spiritual journey that begins at Holy Baptism. As we are baptized by water and the Spirit, the Celebrant thanks God for raising us ". . . to the new life of grace" (BCP, p. 308).

Jesus came to bring newness of life. Life under the reign of God is a constant process in which all things are being "made new."

6. Humility

When his disciples thought about Jesus' reign as Messiah, they wondered about their own future. Who would be greatest in the kingdom? Would there be special places for them?

Jesus' answer was a surprise. He called a child and put him in the middle of the group. Then Jesus said, ". . . Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (*Matthew 18:3-4*).

Jesus' whole ministry was marked by humility. He expressed his power and authority through humble acts of service, and he called on his followers to do the same:

Mark 9:35b—"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

Mark 10:43b-44—" . . . (W)hoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you

must be slave of all.” (See also *Matthew 20:26b*.)

Matthew 23:11-12—“The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke 9:48—“. . . (T)he least among all of you is the greatest.”

Luke 22:26b-27—“. . . (T)he greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

In the Gospel of John, the story of the Last Supper focuses on a humble act of Jesus. Nothing is said about the bread and the wine as in the other Gospels.

At the supper, Jesus got up, put a towel around his waist, poured water in a basin, and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. This was a chore normally performed by a household servant.

When he finished, he sat down again and said, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (*John 13:12b-15*).

The apostle Paul, in his letters to New Testament churches, spoke of himself as “servant of Jesus Christ,” and he reminded the Philippians that Jesus had “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (*Philippians 2:7a*).

In the many centuries of Christian history, Jesus' followers have included shining examples of humble service. The saints whom we honor in the Church Calendar had one thing in common—their humility and willingness to sacrifice for the good of other people. The reign of God, for them, required that they live as servants.

Such a saintly quality still appeals to the present-day world. Thousands have been attracted to the ministry of Mother Theresa of India, founder of a modern order to work among the poor and dying. But if we look closely at the Christian communities in our own neighborhoods, we will be sure to find everyday citizens who also serve with great humility—seeking no reward or attention. Such persons are living examples of the power of God's reign in human hearts.

7. A Different Ethic

In the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew, chapters 5-7*) and in the Sermon on the Plain (*Luke, chapter 6*), Jesus described how we are to behave toward other people if we wish to enter the kingdom of God.

We call these teachings a Christian “ethic” (a Greek word meaning moral customs).

In *Luke 6:27-36*, Jesus gave his followers strong ethical directions. These are not “suggestions” only but commands. They require a turnabout in our views about human relationships. In fact, Jesus' ethic is just the opposite from our natural tendencies:

1. Enemies. When others turn against us, what are we most likely to do?

The daily news is filled with stories of conflict— all the way from verbal attacks to outright war—caused by harsh enmity between individuals, groups, or nations. Jesus asks us to *love* our enemies.

2. Hate. If we know persons who dislike us bitterly, how do we treat them?

No matter how hard we try, we can expect that we will occasionally be hated by others. This is painful to bear, and we may wish to avoid such people altogether. Instead, Jesus asks us to *do good* to them.

3. Ugly words. When people speak hurtful words to us, perhaps even profanity, how do we react?

Again, we are tempted to get back at such persons. We search for ways to match their insults, possibly shouting out our own ugly thoughts. Jesus tells us to offer a word of *blessing*.

4. Abuse. When persons abuse us and harm us in mind and body, what is our response?

Certainly we want to see that justice is done and that such behavior receives proper punishment. But we may continue to harbor deep resentment and anger, making life even harder for ourselves. Jesus teaches us to *pray* for the abusers.

5. Hitting. If people hit us with hands or fists, what happens next?

It is a natural reaction to fight back. Or we could run away from the offender. Jesus makes an extra-ordinary demand: Offer the *other cheek*.

6. Taking. If people take something from us, possibly without even asking permission, what is our natural impulse?

Imagine, for example, that someone took a coat or sweater. Most of us would resist and refuse to accept such behavior. Jesus asks us to *hold nothing back*. We can even offer a shirt or blouse in addition.

7. Giving. When people ask us to give them money, for whatever cause, how do we respond?

Beggars and panhandlers on the streets, as well as authorized solicitors for charity, will frequently plead for money. We may walk on, ignoring what they ask of us. Or we may speak curt refusals to visitors asking for contributions. Instead, Jesus asks us to *give*.

8. Possessing. If our possessions are borrowed or even stolen by someone, what do we do about it?

If the items taken were truly valuable, we might even go to court with a lawsuit to demand their return. In any case, we would likely demand that our things be given back. Jesus says we are *not to ask*.

9. Lending. If friends or acquaintances want to borrow money from us, what is our answer?

Many persons follow a firm personal rule not to lend to others—especially when hard-pressed for resources. But if we do offer a loan, we tend to expect interest or some other favor in return. Jesus said we are to lend anyway, *expecting nothing*.

10. Summary (Golden Rule). How would you describe the way Christ's followers are to treat others?

Jesus captured his whole ethic in one sentence: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (*Luke 6:31*). We call this the Golden Rule. To speak of something as “golden” is a way of saying it has supreme value. It is something to be treasured.

Followers of Jesus Christ, who seek to be loving and sensitive, surely know how we would like to be treated by others. Can we not offer to others the same kind of treatment?

Is it ever possible to achieve the radical ethic of Jesus Christ?

The pages of Christian history include the names of saintly persons who have come remarkably close to Jesus' ideals in their daily lives. But certainly most of us cannot, much of the time.

Even so, our failures ought not to discourage us from trying. We can make an effort to put ourselves in the places of others, to feel their feelings, and to be open to their needs. That is what it means to enter into the kingdom of heaven—to live out our days under the reign of God.

8. Great Commandments

When religious leaders were angry about Jesus' teaching, they tried to trap him with trick questions. Two examples are given in the first part of *Mark, chapter 12*.

1. *Taxes.* Jesus had taught that people should follow only the way of God. Was it, then, lawful for faithful Jews to pay taxes to the

pagan government of Caesar? They were, of course, required to do so under the Roman occupation.

What if Jesus had said no and had urged his listeners to refrain from paying? He would have been in serious trouble. So his response was shrewd: “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's” (*verse 17*).

2. *Resurrection*. Some Sadducees, who did not themselves believe in resurrection of the dead, posed a question that was clearly absurd. Suppose, they said, a woman married and had no children. Her husband died. Then, one after the other, she married her husband's six brothers. All died leaving her childless. In the resurrection, whose wife would she be?

Jesus responded sharply: “. . . (W)hen they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (*verse 25*).

Then came a scribe to ask Jesus a question he must have thought would surely snare him in a dilemma: “Which commandment is the first of all?” (*verse 28c*).

In Jewish tradition, the Ten Commandments received by Moses were honored as the basis for the whole Law of God. If Jesus chose one of these commandments as the greatest, he would be in trouble. All ten are essential.

Jesus answered in a totally unexpected way. He chose to recite the Hebrew *Shema* (which means “hear”). It is found in *Deuteronomy 6:4*: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Then quickly he added a line taken from *Leviticus 19:18*: “. . . (Y)ou shall love your neighbor as yourself . . .”

Putting these two commands together was a completely original summary of the entire Law: love of God and love of neighbor. No other rabbi had ever put these Hebrew passages together in this way.

The teacher who asked the question could only admire and agree with Jesus' reply. Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (*Mark 12:34*).

In the Church, we declare that Christ's followers love God, love their neighbors, and love themselves. These are the requirements for living under God's reign. The kingdom of God that is yet to come, for which we pray daily, will be marked by love toward our Creator and Redeemer, and toward one another in the human family.

The Summary of the Law in *The Book of Common Prayer*, The Holy Eucharist, Rite I (page 324), is taken from the version in *Matthew 22:37-40*.

9. God's Time

As Christians, we understand history as a line always moving forward. This way of thinking about the passing of time comes from the Bible and our Hebrew tradition. It is quite different from a view held by cultures in which history is said to be moving in a circle that is repeating itself. For us, nothing is repeated. Each day, each era, is unique. God is at work in daily, making “all things new.”

Time itself was created by God in the beginning. History is moving toward the end of time, and we are a part of the journey—along with all the “company of heaven” who have gone before us.

At the very mid-point of human history was God's appearance among us as Jesus Christ. This gift of God's Son changed everything, and it offers us a future filled with hope and promise. Because Christ rose from the dead and is living and active, we have the assurance of everlasting life.

So, when we speak of the “kingdom of heaven,” we mean the rule of God announced by the prophets in Israel and Judah, the reign of God in Christ over the events of this present time, and the triumphant rule of God at the end of all time.

PART III

Worship: Mission

1. We Worship, We Work

The word worship comes from very old English words:

“worth”—meaning “of high value,”
and “ship”—a last syllable, as in friendship.

Worship, then, is “worth-ship.” It is our way of saying to God: You are the highest and most, the One above all.

Worship is used to translate several Hebrew and Greek words from the Bible. More often than not, the Biblical writers thought of worship as a “bowing down” before God. The worshiper may even lie face down to express awe and reverence and a desire to obey and be in favor with God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

In a way, our whole lives may be seen as worship. We live and breathe to the glory of God. God is everywhere, and there is nowhere to flee from the presence of God. (See *Psalms 139*.) When Johann Sebastian Bach composed his marvelous music for the Church, he wrote at the beginning of each piece, “To God alone be the glory.”

Worship is also a specific, intentional action of a community of believers. Formal worship by God's people involves *time, space, and order*.

Time. Communities have met to pray and meditate on the Word of God at specific times of the day: morning, noon, and evening. As we shall see, in Part IV of this Treasurebook, the Church's monasteries evolved a schedule of daily prayer that was quite demanding.

For most Christians in the workaday world, Sunday is the primary day of worship. In the seasons of the Church Calendar, other great days of devotion and celebration are observed. It is important to recognize the Church Year as a rhythmic re-living of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as the Church observes time's passage in acts of prayer throughout each year, it also provides for the various aspects of an individual's personal journey through life. We move through the years in stages:

- birth and initiation into the community of faith;
- assuming the responsibilities of adulthood;
- choosing a vocation;
- possibly being married and having a family;
- facing the various crises that come our way (such as sickness, accidents, human conflict, and other problems);

- and finally our death.

All these special moments that mark our days on earth are opportunities for heartfelt worship of God within a supporting community, the Church of Jesus Christ.

Space. To worship God with other people, we need sacred spaces—cathedrals, churches, chapels—indoors and outside, retreat centers, oratories, and other settings that call us to prayer and devotion.

In the Church, we strive for cleanliness, beauty, and reverence as we choose furnishings, windows, musical instruments, and decorations. Our aim is to appeal to all the senses to promote a spirit of reverence and prayer in the presence of the Almighty.

Order. The Church develops liturgies for worship, and these are printed in *The Book of Common Prayer* and other worship resources. Music for singing is provided in *The Hymnal 1982*. Established rites for our prayers and celebrations set us free from wondering what will be done and said, and in what order. We are able to give all our energies to the services.

Liturgy means “the work of the people,” and our worship of God is indeed a work we do to the glory of God.

Our prayers as baptized people in the Church, the Body of Christ, lift us out of ourselves and prompt us to love God and our neighbors.

God has blessed each of us with gifts and talents. Our worship prepares us for our *mission*—to devote our abilities to serving in the world. We are called to labor for the good of the communities in which we have been placed. At school, at play, at work, and in our homes, we have daily opportunities to reach out to other people with kindness and acts of unselfish service.

In the Episcopal tradition, much of our worship is *sacramental*. The word “sacrament” means a solemn obligation, or a serious promise. It comes from the same Latin root as “sacred,” meaning holy. When we celebrate a sacrament, we are asking God to give holiness to the daily events and special occasions of our lives.

The Catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 857-861, states, “The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace”

In previous Treasurebooks, much was said about the great sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist. Jesus' baptism in the Jordan and his last supper with the disciples were the beginning of these acts of worship that have marked the Church from the beginning.

In the pages that follow, we will read about five other “sacramental rites” that are provided for the Christian community. Four of these are called Pastoral Offices, since each rite is administered by a clergy person at a significant moment in the lives of individuals within the Church: Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Reconciliation of

a Penitent, and Unction of the Sick. The rites for Ordination are Episcopal services at which only bishops may preside and consecrate the candidates.

2. We Are Confirmed

When we are baptized as young children, we are not yet ready to make the serious promises of the Baptismal Covenant for ourselves. Our parents do the promising in our behalf.

Later, as we grow older and know what it means to make a “mature commitment” to Jesus Christ, the Church provides a sacramental rite for that purpose. It is called Confirmation. At this service, a bishop lays hands upon the heads of all who are being confirmed and prays that they will be strengthened to carry out the responsibilities of Christian life.

Persons who are baptized as adults are also confirmed by bishops.

The service of Confirmation is found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 413-419. The first part of the service is the same as the beginning of the service of Holy Baptism (pages 299-301). The bishop and the congregation reaffirm the oneness of the Church and of God, in words drawn from *Ephesians 4:4-5*.

The bishop prays the Collect of the Day, and the readings from Scripture follow. Then the candidates are presented, and the bishop asks them two questions:

- Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil?
- Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

The congregation is asked whether they will do all they can to support the candidates in “their life in Christ.”

All who are present are asked to join in renewing their own baptismal covenant.

The bishop prays for all the candidates, then confirms each one with the laying on of hands. The words spoken at that time are given in the Prayer Book, page 418. The second form begins, “Defend, O Lord, your servant *N.* with your heavenly grace, . . .” This prayer was in the 1552 Prayer Book, and it came to England from churches in Germany. (The first form is a modern one composed for the 1979 Prayer Book.)

Newly-confirmed persons may be invited to bring bread and wine to the altar for use at the Holy Eucharist which follows.

Confirmation has been happening in every generation of the Church's history through all the centuries since the time of the Apostles. When we participate in this sacramental rite and honor the persons who are making their public commitment to Christ, we are surely joined by an unseen host of Christian witnesses who have lived in earlier times!

At a Confirmation service, there may also be individuals who were baptized in other Christian traditions and now wish to become members of the Episcopal Church. A form “For Reception,” on page

310 of the Prayer Book, provides for the laying on of hands for these persons. Another form, “For Reaffirmation,” is used for persons who wish to renew their commitment to Christ and wish to reaffirm their faith before the bishop and the congregation. (This form is in keeping with the apostle Paul's words in *Philippians 1:6*.)

3. Holy Orders

The section titled “The Ministry” in the Catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* begins:

Question—Who are the ministers of the Church?

Answer—The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

The term “lay” persons comes from the Greek word, *laos*, which means the people. All the people of a congregation are the laity, and all are called to minister (serve) Jesus Christ in carrying out his mission in the world.

From the time of the New Testament, the Church has recognized three Holy Orders of ministry: bishops, priests, and deacons. They are persons who have responded to a call from God and have been ordained to serve with the laity as ministers of Word and Sacraments. Their roles are described in the Prayer Book, page 510.

Bishops. These persons are successors to the apostles of Jesus Christ. They lead, supervise, and work to preserve the unity of the Church.

Priests. Originally known as presbyters or elders, priests assist the bishops in governing the Church and in carrying out its missionary and pastoral work. They preach the Word of God and administer the Sacraments.

Deacons. Members of this order assist bishops and priests in all of their work. They also have a special responsibility to minister in Christ's name to the poor, the sick, the suffering, and the helpless.

Preparation for clergy is rigorous. Persons seeking ordination become part of a “process” that includes examination by bishops and lay persons, admission as aspirants for ministry, acceptance as candidates, and education in other prescribed courses of study. The final step is satisfactory completion of examinations approved by their dioceses.

The ordained leaders of the Church are set apart in sacramental rites marked by solemn prayer and the laying on of bishops' hands. The services of Ordination for these ministers are provided in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 512-551. The orders of service are quite similar for all three orders.

Ordination takes place at services of Holy Eucharist. Following

the entrance, acclamation, and prayer for purity, the person being ordained stands before the bishop. (At the Ordination of a bishop, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church—or a bishop appointed by the Presiding Bishop—will preside.) Here are the main parts of an Ordination:

The Presentation. Other clergy and lay persons present the candidate to the bishop. The candidate then signs a Declaration in the presence of the congregation. The heart of this document is the same for all three orders: “I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church.” This is a shortened and revised version of oaths in previous Prayer Books.

The presentation concludes with the Litany for Ordinations and a concluding prayer by the bishop. The Litany is found on pages 548-551.

The Examination. Following the Ministry of the Word (Scripture, sermon, and Creed), the bishop examines the candidate. The forms of examination for the three orders are found on pages 517, 531, and 543. In each case, their work is described, and they promise to carry out the ministries to which they are called.

The Consecration. The candidate kneels before the bishop as an ancient hymn is sung—either *Veni Creator Spiritus* (“Come, Creator Spirit”) or *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (“Come, Holy Spirit”). Versions of these hymns are found in *The Hymnal 1982*, 500-504.

A prayer by the bishop is accompanied by the laying on of hands. Bishops lay hands on a person being ordained bishop. Bishops and other priests lay hands on a person being ordained priest. Only the bishop's hands are laid on the head of a person being ordained deacon.

Each newly-ordained person receives a Bible and appropriate vestments. Other appropriate symbols, such as a shepherd's crook, may be presented to a new bishop.

The celebration of Holy Eucharist follows immediately, with the new clergy persons assisting in the administration. Their families may be served Communion before others.

Ordinations are occasions of great joy in the Church. The services are usually followed by public receptions to which the congregation is invited.

Two other Episcopal services are found in the Prayer Book:

Celebration of a New Ministry, used when a priest or other minister moves to a different congregation (pages 557-565).

The Dedication and Consecration of a Church, used soon after a

new church building has been completed and made ready for worshipers (pages 566-579).

4. Holy Matrimony

The sacramental rite of Holy Matrimony in *The Book of Common Prayer* is titled The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (pages 423-432).

A marriage in a Christian community is a solemn covenant made by a man and a woman, in the presence of God. In the Episcopal Church, the following are required:

- Either the man or the woman must be a baptized Christian.
- The ceremony must be formally witnessed by at least two other persons.
- The marriage must conform to the laws of the State and the canons (rules) of the Church.

Either a bishop or a priest presides at the service. They may be assisted by deacons.

The parts of the celebration are as follows:

Address. The clergy person speaks to the whole congregation concerning the institution of marriage. From the creation, God has blessed the union of man and woman. Jesus honored married life when he performed his first miracle at Cana of Galilee. Also, marriage is like the mystery of union between Christ and his Church. Because of its deep significance, “marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.”

The Declaration of Consent. Both the woman and the man promise to be together faithfully as married persons for the rest of their lives—loving, comforting, honoring, and keeping each other, in sickness and in health. The congregation promises to uphold the persons in their marriage.

Ministry of the Word. Selected readings from Holy Scripture are usually followed by a homily (sermon).

The Marriage. The man and the woman take each other by the right hand and speak their solemn vows. The priest then asks God's blessing on rings that are exchanged in words provided on page 427 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. The rings are signs or symbols of the vows the couple have made.

The priest pronounces the man and woman to be husband and wife, in the, “. . . (N)ame of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Then these words are spoken: “Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.” The people answer, “Amen.”

The congregation joins in the prayers provided on pages 428-430.

Among the prayers used at the rite for Holy Matrimony is this one:

Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. *Amen*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 429

The Blessing of the Marriage. The husband and wife kneel, and the priest asks God to bless their union. Finally, the couple and all who are present exchange the Peace.

The couple may leave the church, or a service of Holy Communion may follow.

The Prayer Book also provides a service for The Blessing of a Civil Marriage (pages 433-434), used when a couple married by an official of the State desire to have their union blessed in the Church.

It is not enough only to celebrate and bless marriage. Children in families are precious to the Christian community. Jesus blessed the young and considered them to be models of faith. He said, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (*Mark 10:14b,c*).

The service for A Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child may be found in the Prayer Book, pages 439-445. It can be incorporated into a service of Holy Eucharist or used at Morning or Evening Prayer. Included are readings followed by prayers of thanks for the child's safe delivery, for the parents, and for the child

The Church honors life in families and seeks to nurture parents and children alike through programs of Christian education.

5. Reconciliation

Christians are bound together in the community of the baptized. We care for other people, we pray as a body of faithful people, and we confess our sins and failures to one another.

When a person is aware of having sinned and feels a deep need to be “set right” with God and other people, this longing is called a desire for “reconciliation.” The word means peace—a restored harmony, a healing of a broken relationship.

The Church provides a sacramental rite for The Reconciliation of a Penitent. A penitent is a person who is sorry for having sinned and wishes to repent—to turn around and avoid similar behavior in the future. Penitent persons confess to a priest and receive “absolution” for their sins. To absolve a person means to “wipe out” or erase the sin forever following a sincere confession.

Confession may take place at any time or anywhere. Privacy and secrecy are guarded by the priest, and a person's confession is normally never discussed again.

The rite in *The Book of Common Prayer* (pages 447-452) offers two forms from which the priest, or “confessor,” will choose.

Form One is brief. The penitent person begins by saying, “Bless me, for I have sinned.” The priest then prays that the confession will be truly and humbly offered. In words provided on page 447, the penitent then names the sins, prays for God's forgiveness, and asks the priest, “. . . for counsel, direction, and absolution.”

The priest then offers absolution, concluding with the words, “The Lord has put away all your sins.” The penitent responds, “Thanks be to God.” The priest concludes the rite by saying, “Go in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.” (No person can claim to be without sin, including those who hear confessions.)

Form Two contains the same elements. It begins with the priest and the penitent person saying together *Psalm 51:1-3* and the Trisagion (“Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, have mercy upon us”). The priest then prays that the penitent will be enlightened by God and know God's mercy, then recites one or more of the “comfortable words” of Scripture (the same verses found in the Holy Eucharist, Rite I, page 332).

The priest invites a confession to be made “. . . in the presence of Christ, and of me, his minister, . . .” (BCP, p. 450).

Following the confession, the priest asks two questions:

- “Will you turn again to Christ as your Lord?” (BCP, p. 450).
- “Do you, then, forgive those who have sinned against you?” (BCP, p. 451).

Hearing “I will” and “I forgive them,” the priest then prays for the confessing person and pronounces absolution.

The service ends with words based on the story of the prodigal son (*Luke 15:32*):

The priest concludes,

Now there is rejoicing in heaven; for you were lost, and are found; you were dead, and are now alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Go (or abide) in peace. The Lord has put away all your sins.

The penitent responds,

Thanks be to God.

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 451

Only priests can pronounce absolution for sins. If a confession is made to a deacon or lay person, a simple Declaration of Forgiveness is provided in the Prayer Book, pages 448 and 452.

6. Unction of the Sick

When a person is ill, someone should immediately let the minister of the congregation know about it. The Church provides, in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 453-461, a sacramental rite titled “Ministration to the Sick.” This is also known as Unction (a word that comes from “anointing”).

If the service occurs in a home or hospital, or at some other place outside the church building, the Celebrant begins, “Peace be to this house (place), and to all who dwell in it.”

Part I, Ministry of the Word, may be led by a deacon or lay person. It consists of Scripture reading, optional comments by the minister, and appropriate prayers. Opportunity may be given for the sick person to confess sins, using the form for The Reconciliation of a Penitent. A priest offers absolution. A deacon or lay person substitutes “us” and “you” for “our” and “your” in this prayer.

Part II, Laying on of Hands and Anointing, includes a prayer for blessing the oil if it has not been blessed previously. The priest addresses the person by name and says, “I lay my hands upon you . . .” (BCP, p. 456). Two forms of the prayer for healing are provided. Then the priest may anoint the person with oil, marking the forehead with the sign of the cross. If Holy Communion is not to follow, the Lord's Prayer is said, and the priest concludes with a prayer of blessing.

Part III gives directions for administering Holy Communion if it is desired.

If this rite is used in a regular service of Holy Eucharist, with persons coming forward to receive the laying on of hands and anointing, the Prayer Book recommends that it take place immediately before the exchange of the Peace.

Other prayers for the sick and prayers for use by sick persons are found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 458-461.

7. Seasons and Sacraments

The Church's worship and mission are patterned on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is why the Church year includes six seasons, in order:

Advent declares, with the prophets of Hebrew tradition, that the Messiah is from God. Just as the world awaited the birth of Jesus Christ, so we still await his coming again.

Christmas and *Epiphany* announce the glad news of Immanuel (“God with us”) in Jesus, child of the Virgin Mary.

Lent is a time of penitence and confession, a season in which we ask for spiritual renewal. Our services in these weeks are quiet and thoughtful. We recall what it means to be baptized, and we pray for

all who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. Many congregations offer programs on spirituality and retreats for silence and prayer. Special offerings are designated for the Church's ministries in the world. Holy Week dramatizes the passion of Jesus as he fell into the hands of enemies and was put to death on a cross.

Easter is the fifty-day season of the resurrection. We celebrate the incredible joy of Christ's victory over sin and death.

Pentecost brings a fresh emphasis on the need for the Holy Spirit to be present in all that we do. The gift of the Spirit received by the apostles is ours as well when we are baptized and received into the Church as forgiven sinners.

In the Episcopal Church, the remaining months of the Church Year are called the Weeks following Pentecost. In some Christian traditions, they are named "Ordinary Time" (along with the weeks between Epiphany and Lent).

Just as the Church's life and work are organized around events in the life of Jesus and his apostles, so the personal lives of Christians show a similar pattern:

- Human sin and lostness are like darkness and death. In Christ, we know forgiveness and newness of life.
- Feelings of depression and despair cause us to lose faith and hope. Our spirits are renewed by the Holy Spirit, and joy returns.
- Sickness and pain cause us to suffer and cry out to God and other people. In prayers for healing, we know the grace of Christ's love and compassion. Suffering is bearable.
- Conflict, bitterness, and war point to a broken world. In Christ, reconciliation and peace are possible.

These themes are "echoes" of the reasons behind all the Church seasons. Every season speaks in some way about forgiveness, new life, and hope—the great gifts of Jesus Christ for the people of the world. That is the good news we announce again and again in our worship and in our daily acts of Christian mission.

And if we look closely at the Sacraments and sacramental rites provided by the Church, we discover good news in each one:

Holy Eucharist draws us, again and again, into celebrating our Lord's death and resurrection.

Baptism and Confirmation are about new life in Christ.

Reconciliation and Unction teach us about the victory of Christ over alienation, sins, and sickness.

Marriage, bringing men and women together in love for the establishment of Christian homes and families, is a powerful symbol of the Church's union with Christ.

Ordination reminds us all of God's grace in calling men and women to declare the good news and support us all in the Christian life.

How remarkable that the gifts of Seasons and Sacraments should

all point with power to the same overwhelming message: Jesus Christ is “. . . the way, and the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*)!

8. At the Center

The Church exists because of one event in human history. If that event had not taken place, there would be no New Testament, no ministry in the name of Jesus, no church buildings, no Christian worship and sacramental life. This incredible happening is announced on Easter Day:

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is reaffirmed at every celebration of Holy Eucharist. For example, in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Rite II, Prayer A, page 363, the congregation joins in the memorial acclamation:

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Other forms of this acclamation are found on pages 368, 371, and 375. (They are borrowed from ancient Eastern liturgies.)

The four Gospels offer differing accounts of what happened on the first day of the week following Jesus' death on the cross. But they share the same central truth: Women went to the tomb, and they found it empty.

When Jesus' disciples heard the women's story, they did not believe. Surely, they said, this must be an “idle tale” (*Luke 24:11*). When Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself, “he went home, amazed at what had happened” (*verse 12*).

The letters of Paul and The Acts show that the early Christians came gradually to a new understanding of *time* as a result of Jesus' rising from the dead.

A radical division of time is now firmly fixed in the consciousness of the whole world. The Church eventually divided human history in this way:

- The years of Israel's history and the writings of the Hebrew prophets are B. C. (before Christ).
- All the years since the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ are A. D. (from the Latin, *Anno Domini*, meaning “a year of the Lord”).

Today it is an accepted practice to speak of all the time since Christ as C. E. (the Common Era). All the years before Christ are B. C. E. (before the Common Era). The risen Lord reigns over our calendars.

The resurrection is a victory we can compare to the miracle of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. That event had been totally unexpected, and it brought the hope of reaching the Promised Land. The people were saved from slavery and death in Egypt when God did this surprising and wonderful thing.

The resurrection was all the more stunning and decisive. Nothing would ever again be the same after Jesus rose from the dead and brought us hope of everlasting life. The resurrection means God has also won and will win final victory for love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and trust.

Our faith in the risen Christ assures us that not even death can separate us from the love of God. Every day of our lives has a purpose. We can work for peace and justice with glad hearts and without growing discouraged.

A strong test of our faith in the resurrection comes when we face the death of a friend or loved one. The Church prays with all who sorrow.

At the time of death, a clergy person and family members may use the forms provided in *The Book of Common Prayer*—for Ministration at the Time of Death (pages 462-467) and for The Burial of the Dead (Rites One and Two, pages 469-505).

These services offer comfort in litanies and prayers, in selections from The Psalms, and especially in readings from the New Testament that declare again the good news: Because Christ lives, we too shall know eternal life.

9. Ascended into Heaven

When we say the Nicene Creed at church services, these phrases are together:

On the third day he *rose again*
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he *ascended into heaven*
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 358

It is the same in the Apostles' Creed: the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ are both key articles of faith for Christians.

Forty days after Easter morning, the Church celebrates Ascension Day as one of the Principal Feasts.

Only Luke, writer of a Gospel and The Acts, mentions the ascension. The accounts are in *Luke 24:44-53* and *Acts 1:1-11*.

The disciples were still amazed and hard pressed to believe each time the risen Christ appeared. They wondered what the future held for them. The Lord had promised that the Holy Spirit would come in power and offer both comfort and direction.

According to the first account, Jesus led the disciples to Bethany, a short distance from Jerusalem. He blessed them, spoke of their mission to the world, and then “. . . withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven” (*Luke 24:51b*).

In the second version, Jesus told his disciples they would be his “. . . witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (*Acts 1:8b*). Just then, “. . . he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (*Acts 1:9b*).

The message of Ascension Day is that the risen Christ is lifted up to reign over all human affairs. He is Lord of history and Lord of our individual lives. We are assured that our life journeys will end just as Jesus' did. We, too, will be in the everlasting presence of God.

We can say that the ascension is a final chapter in the resurrection story. Ascension Day in the Church's calendar comes just ten days before the end of the Fifty Days of Easter. Jesus Christ has been truly lifted up from sin and evil, and from all the schemes people can think of to oppose the love and justice of God. Not even a grave could hold him.

We are called to be witnesses to this good news. That is why we worship. It is our mission in the world.

PART IV

Church History

1. We Believe . . .

In the long story of Christianity, certain key issues stand out. None is more important than this question: *Who is Jesus Christ?*

All baptized believers must decide in our hearts who he is, what he does, and why we bear the name “Christian.”

The Latin word, *credo*, means “I believe.” It is the root for “Creed”—a confession of commonly-held beliefs.

It is not surprising that the early centuries of Church history were marked by strong argument about the person of God's Son. Was he human? Was he God? In what sense was he both?

As churches spread throughout the East and southern Europe, teachers of the Christian faith were isolated from one another. Lively centers of teaching and learning were located in Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. To the west, the bishop of Rome defended the faith and claimed special authority. A less influential center of Christianity was Jerusalem. Their beliefs about Jesus took shape in formal statements. But there was no worldwide agreement.

By the fourth century, the debates were very serious indeed. The future of the Church required that its leaders adopt a satisfactory Creed of essential Christian beliefs.

The patriarch (bishop) of Alexandria, whose name was Alexander, was faced with the serious problem of how to deal with the teachings of Arius, a priest in that region.

Arius had considerable knowledge, and he was a skillful speaker and debater. He was also proud, ambitious, and inclined to be stubborn. Several times before his ordination, he had to be disciplined for promoting division in the Church.

He was unable to believe in the divinity of Jesus as God's Son. He insisted—contrary to Church tradition—that there had once been a time when the Son did not exist. At that time, God was not the Father.

God created the Son as a lesser being. The Son was an intermediary between God and human beings. He was adopted by God and used in the creation of the world, but he was perfect only to a degree.

The Emperor Constantine called the first ecumenical (worldwide) council of the Church. The pope of Rome could not attend but sent representatives. In all, 318 bishops assembled in Nicaea, in Asia Minor, in the year 325. They met from May 20 until around July 25. About two weeks after their discussions began, the emperor himself

arrived to sit in on the meeting. He stayed the rest of the time and gave the bishops a banquet at the end.

Constantine told the council that it must work for unity. He said that division in the Church would be worse than war. He let the clergy do all the debating, but he continued to insist that they should finally agree.

As few as twelve and perhaps as many as twenty-two of the bishops favored Arius. Indeed, Arius spoke so bluntly about his beliefs that the council participants concluded early that he was mistaken about the nature of God the Son.

Athanasius, a deacon who assisted Patriarch Alexander, defended the view that the Son is truly God. He took the lead in guiding the council to its conclusion. He warned of the great danger to the Church if it accepted Arius' views. His written accounts of the council show that he took a firm stand and insisted that the decisions it made "are not to be reversed."

In the end, the bishops adopted a statement of faith that came to be known as the Nicene Creed. It was probably based on an earlier baptismal statement, but included an important new clarification. According to the bishops, God the Father and God the Son were of the same "substance" (being). They reaffirmed their belief in the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity. God is One in three Persons. The Trinity is a mystery, to be held in unity and never divided.

The emperor was pleased. Only two bishops had voted against the Creed. (Later, three bishops repudiated their votes. Still others accepted the Creed only partially.) It appeared that the Church was united.

But that was not the end of the matter. Arius continued to spread his views. He composed clever ditties about his beliefs and taught people to sing them in the streets. Arius lived twelve years after the Council of Nicaea. When he died, his followers continued to teach his beliefs.

Athanasius remained the Arians' enemy. In 328, he was named successor to Patriarch Alexander. He refused to reinstate Arius to the priesthood. As a result, he was charged with disturbing the peace, and accused of murder and adultery. None of these claims had any basis in fact. Then he was charged with holding up grain shipments to Constantinople. Constantine came to believe this and turned against Athanasius. He was exiled.

In 337, Constantine died, and Athanasius was permitted to return to Alexandria. But a plot was developed to get rid of him and install an Arian in his place. He fled to Rome. There, in 340, a council stood firmly on Athanasius' side.

Athanasius was able to return to Alexandria where he served as patriarch until 373. He is remembered as a great scholar who wrote many sermons, articles, and letters. On May 2 in the Church's calendar, we give thanks for the life of this saint.

As we join in the Nicene Creed at our services of Holy Eucharist, we can be very thankful that it continues to define the essential Christian beliefs. With gratitude, we say these lines:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 358

The Apostles' Creed belongs to the Church of the West. It expresses belief in the Trinity and is believed to have originated in a simple form in the second century. It was expanded in the fourth century to be used as a Roman creed at baptisms. The Creed as we now have it dates to the sixth century in France. In the ninth century, it became the official baptismal creed of Rome. The Episcopal Church's Baptismal Covenant contains the Apostles' Creed (BCP, p. 304).

The Creed of St. Athanasius (the Prayer Book, pages 864-865) resembles his writing and thought, but it was produced by others, probably in the fifth century. It is not used in public worship.

2. We Worship

Throughout history, the Church's people have been deeply affected by their ways of worshipping God. In the beginning, when all Christians were Jewish, the followers of Jesus Christ continued to observe the established patterns of saying or singing The Psalms, hearing Scripture readings, and observing a daily and yearly cycle of prayer.

The chief day of worship came to be Sunday rather than the sabbath, in remembrance that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.

The weekly gatherings of Christians were focused on celebrations of the Eucharist. Because of the developing opposition to public assemblies by the Church, Christians did most of their praying in private. This continued through centuries of persecution.

When the Emperor Constantine became a Christian, persecution ended. Churches were built, and times of public prayer were established. Sundays became legal holidays, free from all but essential work, by the year 372.

In both the East and the West, in the fourth through the sixth centuries, communities of monks developed rules for daily work and worship. They met at appointed times to pray.

In the West, the community of Benedict of Nursia (480-540)

regularly observed eight daily occasions for prayer:

Vigil or Matins. After seven or eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, the monks arose around 1:45 or 2:30 in the morning for this first hour of prayer, lasting between an hour and an hour-and-a-half. The community then spent time in reflection and chant practice.

Lauds. Beginning around 5:00 to 5:45, this service was brief, followed by spiritual reading.

Prime. This hour coincided with dawn and began about 6:30 to 7:30 according to the season of the year.

The monks' work day was punctuated by three "little hours" of prayer:

Terce, around 9:00;

Sext, at noon; and

None, at 3:00.

Vespers. This hour came in the early evening and was followed by a public reading.

Compline. Night prayers were said just before the monks retired around 7:00.

Benedict's community believed their chief duty was the *opus Dei* ("work of God")—the chanting of the daily liturgy. In the course of every week, they chanted all 150 of The Psalms.

Today, the hours are still followed in monasteries and convents. Many other Christians around the world worship privately by observing daily Morning, Noonday, and Evening Prayer, and ending with Compline. In some Episcopal churches and communities, the hours of prayer are offered in public assemblies. The early pages of *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 37-135, provide these liturgies.

The influence of St. Benedict can be seen in our Prayer Book services. For example, his community began their morning prayer with *Psalms 51:16*. We continue that tradition, saying, "Lord, open our lips. And our mouth shall proclaim your praise" (Morning Prayer II, BCP, p. 80).

The Church's yearly calendar developed over a period of several centuries.

Christmas came to be celebrated on December 25 in Rome, having been established sometime between 243 and 354. In the East, this feast was overshadowed by *Epiphany*. The West knew nothing about Epiphany until the time of the Council of Nicaea, but the Roman church began to observe it by 361.

Scholars believe that every Sunday was considered a celebration of *Easter* until the fourth century, when Christians in Jerusalem developed a more elaborate church calendar. At that time, Easter was celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox (March 21). For a long time afterward, customs varied in the churches. In England, the Council of Whitby (663) decided Easter would be observed according to the Roman practice.

Originally, *Pentecost* was the whole Fifty Days of Easter, to correspond to the seven-week Jewish harvest festival. On the final

Day, Christians remembered the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. This festival became a special time for baptisms, along with Easter Day.

Ascension appeared on the Church calendar in the fourth century. By then, Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Holy Week were generally observed.

All Saints' Day is believed to have originated in Ireland. From there it spread to England and the continent of Europe. The first evidence that it was observed in Roman churches is dated 835.

Church history records many controversies about sacramental rites. Since the twelfth century, it had been established that there were seven sacraments.

Studies of liturgy show that the practices of Christians in different parts of the world have always varied. Church architecture, furnishings, and clergy vestments evolved over many centuries and are still undergoing change.

The “liturgical movement” of the twentieth century has brought together scholars from many traditions and nations. Their studies have resulted in many new prayer books, hymnals, and other worship materials, including *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979) and *The Hymnal 1982*.

Books called commentaries have helped to disclose the extensive history of Christian liturgies. It is likely that any “new idea” we might have about the praise of God can be traced to similar customs in earlier times!

In recent decades, some of the simplicity of the early Church has been restored. An example is the Holy Table facing the congregation at the Eucharist, in place of stone altars against the wall. The clergy face the people as the sacred meal is celebrated.

Worship in the languages of the people is now taken for granted, with Latin no longer dominant in much of the world as it was for many centuries.

Churches have shown greater sensitivity to the ethnic backgrounds of worshipers and have incorporated more of the native customs, including locally-produced music.

3. Reformation

Following the reign of Constantine, and the end of official persecution of Christians, the Church gained enormous power. It, too, came to be like a great empire.

The fortunes of the Church in the West changed significantly after the conversion of Constantine. During the 150 years following his conversion, the Church benefitted from official Roman support, with bishops taking on many of the characteristics of Roman officials and Christians building great houses of worship modeled on Roman court

houses (basilicas).

The Roman Empire in the West collapsed in the fifth century, however, as a result of the invasion of Germanic tribes from the north and east. Christians began the long task of evangelizing northern Europe, with much of the work left to monastic Christians.

Beginning in the year 800, the Church formed a succession of Holy Roman Emperors, of whom Charlemagne was the first. The relationship of the pope to the Holy Roman Emperor and other Christian monarchs of Europe brought the Church both advantages and disadvantages.

On the positive side, it enabled the Church to establish a parish system that provided virtually everyone in Europe a place for regular worship and pastoral care. The pope could also provide uniformity in doctrine and challenge ambitious nobles and monarchs who used the Church for their own ends.

On the negative side, there was no way to challenge a pope who misused his authority. The leaders of the Church began to look to Rome as a model. Worship was conducted only in Latin that few people outside of Rome understood. By the fifteenth century, most lay people watched the Eucharist while only the clergy received. The hierarchy raised funds for church projects by issuing indulgences that some claimed to grant forgiveness for sins not yet committed.

By the sixteenth century, it was clear that reform was badly needed. Leaders of courage arose to call the Church back to its message and mission. Their preaching, teaching, and writing ignited a spiritual flame that spread through all of Europe. The period is called the age of the Protestant Reformation.

Many individuals and groups took part in discussions and put their lives on the line for Christian truth as they understood it. Three names stand out: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Thomas Cranmer. Their views swayed the Church, and every generation since their time has been affected by their actions.

Martin Luther. Born into a peasant family in 1483, in a German village, Martin Luther was a bright student, a good musician, and a devout Christian. He was very sensitive about his own sins and failures, and he worried constantly about whether he would be admitted to heaven.

While a student in the university, Luther concluded that his best hope of personal salvation would be life as a monk. In a monastery, he prayed, confessed his sins often, and wore a hair shirt next to his skin.

Then one day as he was studying the New Testament, he read these words of the apostle Paul: “The one who is righteous will live by faith” (*Romans 1:17b*). As if by a miracle, his whole outlook was changed.

By *faith!* We are not saved by anything we ourselves do but by what the love of God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. We are not made whole by fasting and self-punishment but by the mercy of

God. Jesus is not most of all a Judge; he is our Savior.

Luther became a teacher in the new university in Wittenberg. There he shared the good news of Christ in all its hope and power. Students flocked to hear him.

But as Luther looked at the life of the Church, he was deeply troubled. Its representatives were demanding that people pay sums of money into “credit accounts” for the release of their deceased family members from purgatory. The pope of Rome had encouraged this sale of “indulgences.” It was a major source of revenue for the Church.

Luther attacked this practice as completely contrary to Scripture. On the Eve of All Saints' Day, October 31, 1517, he nailed his written protest (Ninety-Five Theses) to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral. The newly-invented printing press made it possible for his words to be published and distributed widely.

The next years of his life were harrowing. Pope Leo excommunicated him for his disobedience. He was called before Charles V, the emperor, and ordered to cease his teaching. Luther refused, saying, “Here I stand. I will not recant. I can do no other.”

For a long time, Germany was on the brink of division and religious war. But Luther continued his ministry. He reformed the life and worship of churches. There would be no more obedience to popes, no sales of indulgences, no worshiping of relics (bones and possessions of saints), and no more viewing of Masses as magical sources of salvation.

The Bible would be preached, the services would be in German. At Eucharist, the people would receive both the bread the wine. (The Church of Rome had allowed only priests to receive the wine.)

Luther kept familiar customs: ordination of men as ministers and bishops; ancient books of prayer; vestments for clergy, and altar lights.

He married a former nun, and they had three sons and three daughters.

He wrote the stirring Reformation hymn, “A mighty fortress is our God” (*The Hymnal* 1982, 687, 688). And he composed the tender Christmas carol, “Ah, dearest Jesus, Holy Child.”

Today, “Lutheran” churches may be found all around the world.

John Calvin. The Protestant Reformation spread to France, where the Catholics hunted down Protestants and tried to stamp out the movement.

A brilliant law student named John Calvin was a student in the universities of Paris and Orleans. He learned Greek and studied the New Testament. He also read Luther's writings. Convinced that the Church needed to be corrected for its abuses, he joined the Protestants. He was arrested and went to prison for a brief time.

Hearing that parts of Switzerland were safer than France, Calvin went to the city of Basle. When he was just twenty-six years old, he wrote his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which

proclaimed the Protestant message in forceful and reasoned language.

On a journey to Geneva, Calvin was persuaded to stay there and labor to reform the Church. The city council had declared its rejection of the authority of the Church of Rome. They wanted no more money going to Rome as a result of the sale of indulgences.

Before long, people also rejected Calvin's reforms and drove him out of Geneva for a three-year period. Then he returned and made the city a stronghold for the Reformation.

Insisting on the total sovereignty of God, Calvin was intense in his reforms. He started schools in which children were taught a catechism he composed. He preached, taught, and wrote commentaries on the Scriptures. Geneva changed from a city notorious for drunkenness and other sins.

Calvin enforced strong discipline. One could be put in prison for laughing in church or sleeping during a sermon. Showy clothes were no longer allowed.

And he set up a new way for congregations to be governed by elected elders. The word "Presbyterian" is based on the fact that "teaching elders" replaced the authority of bishops.

Thomas Cranmer. The Reformation came to England shortly after it had started in Germany/and Switzerland. It was less violent, and in the end most of the old customs of the Church were not changed.

King Henry VIII had opposed the ideas of Martin Luther. But when he himself came into conflict with the pope over his desire to divorce and marry another, he broke with Rome. Parliament made the king head of the Church of England.

Students at Cambridge and Oxford read Luther's works and were convinced that he taught the "real gospel." Some went to Switzerland and came back with the teachings of Calvin.

Even more important, English people began reading the Scriptures in their own tongue.

Thomas Cranmer was the Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII. He persuaded the king to direct that every parish church have a Bible in the English language.

Following the death of King Henry, his ten-year-old son became King Edward VI. His guardians were in favor of an English church. During Edward's reign of just six years, Cranmer took the Latin service books containing the Mass and other forms of worship and made them over into *The Book of Common Prayer*, the first English Prayer Book (1549).

Edward was followed by Mary, a daughter of Henry, who was committed to the pope and the Catholic faith. She put all Protestants in deadly danger. Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, bishops, were both burned at the stake.

In the same prison with these two was Thomas Cranmer. But he did not want to die, and he was confused about his loyalty to the queen and his duty to the Church of England. He reversed himself

and said he was wrong about the Reformation.

The queen directed that he make a public confession at St. Mary's Church, Oxford. He surprised everyone by announcing that he rejected the pope and was renouncing his earlier shift to the Catholic position.

He was burned at the stake at once, in 1556.

After five more years of Mary's reign, the pope's power in England came to an end. Elizabeth, another daughter of Henry, came to the throne. She was Protestant, and she directed that all worship was to be conducted with *The Book of Common Prayer*.

On the calendar of the Episcopal Church, October 16 is the date on which we remember the saints, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer.

The age of the Protestant Reformation continued into the seventeenth century. It was a great struggle involving kings, queens, bishops, archbishops, and humble priests and scholars. There were excesses on all sides. Some Protestant leaders were too quick to destroy traditions and things of great beauty. In turn, those who opposed them were cruel and caused needless suffering.

4. Bible Translation

Faithful Christians declare that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, containing "all things necessary to salvation."

The Reformers believed that the Bible's saving message needed to be available to all people, in their own languages. A chief reason for learning to read was in order that everyone could explore the Scriptures.

In England, **John Wycliffe** (1320-1384), a scholar and priest at Oxford University, took a special interest in the faith of the common people. He had parts of the Bible translated from Latin into English, and he sent out preachers to teach Scripture to all who would hear. Nearly two centuries before the Reformation, he said that people could be saved by believing the Bible and seeking to live by it. This would be true, he declared, even if there were no priests or popes.

Wycliffe was condemned for his teachings and forced to leave the university.

The first great English Bible was produced by **William Tyndale** (1492-1546). He was educated at Oxford and Cambridge, where he mastered both Hebrew and Greek and gained the ability to translate the Scriptures directly from their original languages.

Tyndale's great concern for the souls of all people prompted him to work devotedly on making the Word of God accessible to everyone. He said to a church leader, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that drives the plow shall know more of the scripture than you do!"

His work was opposed, and he had to continue working in

Germany and Belgium. When he finished the English New Testament, he was able to get it printed and smuggled into England. People read it excitedly. It was the first time they had seen the Bible *printed* in their own language.

The king and bishops set out to discover and burn all copies of Tyndale's New Testament. The bishop of London arranged for the burning outside St. Paul's Cathedral. But the more books the bishop burned, the more money went back to Tyndale to print additional copies.

His enemies found him. Before he could complete the Old Testament, he was arrested, put in prison, and strangled. His body was burned.

Tyndale's martyrdom did not end the bringing of Bibles to English people. Even before his death, **Miles Coverdale** (1488-1569) was beginning to carry on his work. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, encouraged Coverdale, a priest and friar at Cambridge.

He was forced to leave England. He worked with Tyndale in Germany and Belgium, and his translation also depended partly on the work of Luther and Swiss Protestants.

Coverdale became a bishop under Edward VI, then had to leave that post under Queen Mary. He was restored to favor under Queen Elizabeth.

Until 1579, *The Book of Common Prayer* contained the Psalter from Coverdale's *Great Bible*.

In 1611, in the reign of King James I, an authorized English Bible was published to replace the earlier *Great Bible*. A group of scholars labored seven years to produce this Bible of unmatched beauty.

Today the Church is enriched by translations of the Bible in hundreds of languages and dialects. Bible societies and other organizations have assisted in their distribution.

5. The Church in the New World

Settlers with roots in the Church of England had a great influence on religious life in the American colonies. Some remained fully within the Anglican tradition and were loyal to the king. Others were in rebellion and came to the New World to be free from the Church's rule.

Virginia. Under the sponsorship of the Virginia Company, 144 English citizens arrived by ship in 1607. The Company's purposes were to help build a strong navy, to spread the Gospel among native peoples, to find precious metals, and to establish a Protestant English colony in a land threatened by Catholic Spain.

As they landed, the weary travelers knelt on American soil and thanked God. Robert Hunt, priest of the Church of England, celebrated Holy Communion. The altar was crudely made, with a sail

fastened above it. The place was Jamestown, where a chapel was one of the first buildings to be erected.

The people, at first only the men, said Morning and Evening Prayer each day. Services with sermons were held twice on Sundays.

The first clergy in America had good educations, mostly from Oxford and Cambridge. Robert Hunt lived only two years after arriving because of the severe conditions. Other priests also died young.

By 1650, approximately 30 Anglican parishes had been established in Virginia—the only ones in the colonies.

Key figures in the founding of the United States, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry, were members of the Church of England.

Massachusetts. An aftermath of the English Reformation was the appearance of groups called “Puritans.” They wanted to purify the Church of extravagant vestments and ceremonies. Some chose to abandon the Prayer Book as well. They also condemned Sunday recreation as a violation of the commandment, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

A number of the Puritans became Independents and Separatists, and they worshiped in their own groups instead of their parish churches. Separatists, such as the Pilgrims, thought the state Church was beyond redemption. Non-separatists, such as the Puritans, hoped their example would result in Church reform.

However, the Puritans gave up on their vision of shaping the Church of England in the early years of the English Civil War. When some were arrested and punished for their views, they went to Holland where they were free to worship in their own way.

Longing to return to England and build a church, these Pilgrims took a ship to Plymouth, on the coast. There they arranged for another ship, the Mayflower, to take about one hundred persons across the Atlantic. They hoped to settle in Virginia.

The Mayflower was tossed by storms and landed after a two-month journey at the spot now called Cape Cod. By December they had chosen a place to settle, which they called Plymouth.

In the New World, these Puritans continued to rebel against the rule of the Church of England. They believed it had grown worldly and careless. Especially they wanted no bishops, choosing instead to have ministers elected by each congregation.

The Plymouth colony established churches called “Congregational.”

In 1630, another group of less radical Puritans from England planted a colony at Massachusetts Bay. They founded the town of Boston, which grew into the colony of Massachusetts.

Religious life in Massachusetts was controlled by leaders with strict views about the truth of God. They made laws for belief and worship that were just as severe and full of punishment as any laws

had been in England. The difference was that their rules were made by majority vote and not by a king or a bishop.

Desire for real “religious freedom” caused Roger Williams, of Massachusetts, to purchase land from the Narraganset Indian tribe for a new settlement that he named Providence. Out of it came the colony of Rhode Island—a place where all people were free to follow their own convictions about religion. Williams was re-baptized by a Baptist minister, but he did not call himself a Baptist. He preferred Seeker or Independent.

These early Christian settlements in America affected the nation's character, from colonial times to the present. They were also destined to help extend the Gospel of Christ to other parts of the world.

6. Missionaries

At every moment in history, the Church is called to labor at bringing the good news of Jesus Christ and curing diseases everywhere (*Luke 9:1-6*). Doing so is called our “mission.”

Two missionary societies, founded by the Rev. Thomas Bray, helped to establish congregations of the Church of England in all the American colonies:

- The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), begun in 1699, worked to provide books and tracts.
- The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), started in 1701, paid the salaries of most Anglican clergy in states in which the Church was not established.

These societies helped to support the clergy and aided in conversion of native Americans and blacks.

The strength of the Church of England in the colonies was limited severely by the American Revolution and its aftermath (1776-1812). Some clergy, in sympathy with the English crown, continued to pray in public for King George III. During the war, many of these priests fled to England or Canada. The result was a great shortage of ordained ministers.

The clergy who remained in America established the Protestant Episcopal Church at the first General Convention in 1785. For some time, many congregations continued to lack leaders. They declined in membership.

During that same period, in the late 1700s, John and Charles Wesley of the Church of England, and George Whitefield, a powerful preacher, began a religious “revival.” Great crowds listened to Whitefield's sermons. John Wesley preached out of doors. His brother, Charles, wrote hundreds of hymns that were sung with joy. Twenty-one of these are in *The Hymnal 1982*.

All three men came to America to proclaim the Gospel. The Wesleys were cordially received by Episcopal Church leaders in 1730. However, they left for England and never returned. Whitefield

was not well received when he came in the 1740s by American Anglicans. They felt he had moved too far from the traditions of *The Book of Common Prayer*. In time, the three formed “Methodist” churches.

Religious revival led Baptists and others in England to form the London Missionary Society, in 1792. Zeal for missions spread to America. A group of students at Andover, Massachusetts, offered themselves as missionaries wherever God might send them.

In 1804, Absalom Jones, a black who had been ordained a priest in Philadelphia, spoke out against slavery. His work strengthened the Church's ministry among black people in America.

Not until 1830 was the Episcopal Church strong enough and ready to send out missionaries on behalf of the whole church.

The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society was reorganized. The first overseas missionaries went to Greece and Syria. They worked with Orthodox Christians, helping with education and publishing.

Later, missionary teams went to China and Liberia. In the next hundred years, missions were expanded throughout the world.

In America, the Episcopal Church took part with other Christians in missions to establish Sunday Schools on the western frontiers. Early Sunday Schools were established in Pennsylvania, at the urging of Bishop William White. He had visited such schools in England and believed they would be helpful to the church in the United States.

In the nineteenth century, especially after the Civil War, the Episcopal Church grew stronger in the middle and far west. New schools and seminaries were established. More and more dioceses were formed.

As the frontiers expanded, more missionaries went to preach the Gospel to Indian tribes. Work was increased in Haiti, Mexico, southern Brazil, and Alaska. Bishops went to Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Hawaii, and the Panama Canal Zone. Episcopal churches related to America were established in Europe.

The twentieth century, with two great World Wars and many other upheavals, has seen many changes in the role of missionaries. Today's missions, for example, offer greater help to improve health, education, and agriculture, and to meet other needs of people.

7. The Church and Society

Jesus told this parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened” (*Matthew 13:31b-32*).

The Church has always believed that the good news of God in Christ—freely shared—is like yeast for the world. It affects wide circles of people in every society, just as yeast spreads through dough and affects the whole lump.

This Christian “yeast” takes the form of *words* (sermons, teaching, conversation) and *deeds* (real actions to offer care and help to others).

In every generation, serious issues arise that demand words and deeds from the Church's leaders and congregations. Christians are called to combat evil and injustice—and to promote peace and human dignity.

Racism. All human beings are creatures of God and share God's love. No race is meant to be above others, for we are all one people. We all belong to Christ and have our unity in him (*Galatians 3:27-29*).

Sadly, even the Church allowed slavery and bitter policies of segregation to go on for centuries. In the United States, slavery of black people was accepted as a necessity. Long after the Civil War ended this practice, racial segregation continued and was upheld by the courts.

African Americans began attending northern Episcopal seminaries from the middle of the nineteenth century. John Walker was the first twentieth century African American to attend a seminary in the South. In 1951, he was admitted to study for the priesthood and later became bishop of the Diocese of Washington, DC.

When the Supreme Court outlawed school segregation in 1954, the movement to secure civil rights for all black Americans increased in momentum. Many Episcopalians joined the battle. Money was given to aid the cause. One young Episcopalian, Jonathan M. Daniels, was shot and killed in Alabama, August 20, 1965, as he worked to help black people organize. He is now honored on the Church's calendar of saints.

At every General Convention since the crucial 1960s, issues of racism have been a focus of discussion. The national Church and many other Episcopal institutions changed their investment policies in South Africa, in opposition to apartheid (separation of blacks and whites). Support was given to Archbishop Desmond Tutu as he labored to quell violence and disunity in that country.

Peace. Following the great World War II, Christian churches have labored to speak out against international conflict and aggression. Fervent prayer, published statements, and diplomatic missions by Anglican churches around the world have contributed to efforts for peace.

Times of testing for Americans have continued for decades—as in the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf crisis, and other military ventures. As the Cold War ended and new struggles developed among nations of Europe and Asia, new questions arose about how to stop bloodshed in ways that would not end in even greater loss of life.

In the Middle East, northern Ireland, and elsewhere, Anglicans played important roles in peace negotiations. Delegations of Church leaders visited Germany and Russia following the end of Communist rule. Special help was provided to help rebuild Orthodox churches and strengthen seminaries. Books and Bibles were sent in large quantities.

Always, we are called to “. . . pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (*Romans 14:19*).

Sexism. The issue of women's rights came to the forefront in new and serious ways during the twentieth century. Not until the early years of that century did women gain the right to vote in the United States. To deny equality for women and men is “sexism.”

Major American church bodies struggled, for example, with the question of women's ordination. In 1976 did the General Convention officially approved the ordination of women in the Episcopal Church. Since that time, women have served in increasing numbers as deacons, priests, and bishops. The first woman to be consecrated bishop, in 1989, was Barbara Harris of Philadelphia, a black leader and editor.

Slowly but surely, the liturgies of the Church and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible reflected a sensitive effort to avoid using only masculine pronouns (he and his) when speaking about people-in-general. Guidelines were established for writing and speaking that would avoid male-dominated language.

Human Sexuality. With powerful intensity, issues related to human sexuality have commanded the attention of the Church.

Serious study is been given to the nature of homosexuality and the roles and rights of homosexual people in society.

Sexual abuse of children and sexual harassment among adults have demanded strong action in the Church. Programs to educate both clergy and laity about these social evils are now mandatory. Special efforts have been made also to offer wholesome Christian education for children and youth in dealing responsibly with their sexual growth and development.

Other Areas. The Church has been involved in other areas of society through programs for the elderly and those in poverty. Programs have been initiated by both dioceses and individual churches.

Beginning in the 1960, there was a concerted effort by many dioceses to establish retirement homes throughout the country. Later, as the number of homeless people increased, churches opened soup kitchens, provided temporary shelters, and established housing programs. Helping the most needy continues to be a priority of the Church.

In facing all these areas, Christians have struggled to work across denominational lines and to act in cooperation with one another. The need for clear voices and bold action continues, in every generation of the Church's life.

8. Working for Unity

Jesus prayed for unity among his followers (*John 17:11*). The writer of the letter to the Ephesians also appealed for Christian unity, declaring that there is “. . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, . . .” (*Ephesians 4:5-6a*).

But consider the words of the Collect, “For the Unity of the Church,” in *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 818. It begins:

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; . . .

What are the unhappy divisions? Why do they continue in the Church?

As Christian churches have grown, divided, and spread around the world, their people have held to different views about what is truly necessary for Christian faith and practice. The matters that divide are related to issues of belief and ways of governing.

Anglican churches have taken part for many decades in discussions with other Christian bodies, to strive for greater agreement. Many of these conversations have been within what is called “the ecumenical movement”—organized efforts to bring together the streams of Christian believers (Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant).

In 1886 and 1888, the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, and the Chicago-Lambeth Conference adopted a statement called the Quadrilateral (from Latin, meaning “four sides”). See Historical Documents, *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 878.

The Quadrilateral set forth four essentials for Christian unity (the

Lambeth version adds the Apostle's Creed):

- The Holy Scriptures as the revealed Word of God;
- The Nicene Creed as a sufficient summary of the Christian faith;
- The two sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Supper of the Lord (Eucharist);
- The historic Episcopate (governance by bishops in succession from the apostles).

Large numbers of Christians can agree on the first two: Scripture and Nicene Creed. Differences widen concerning the sacraments. And the issue of the Episcopate produces sharp divisions.

Within the Anglican Communion itself, leaders have taken opposing positions about ecumenical relationships. Some believe that God calls all Christians to continue face-to-face encounters in pursuit of unity. Others retreat from the discussions because of the firm conviction that there is no more to be gained from them.

Some observers see a discouraging decline in inter-Church study and cooperation. Today's scene is in sharp contrast to the hope felt just after World War II when the World Council of Churches was formed in a great assembly in Amsterdam.

At that meeting, in 1948, representatives from every continent gathered to sing in joyful procession as a lengthy and encouraging meeting began.

Clergy and laity came from nations that had been at war with one another. They declared their great hope for a stronger Church, working for a world in which Christians would exercise greater love and compassion. Many Anglicans from throughout the world, including the United States, attended the historic Amsterdam Assembly. Eastern Orthodox Christians brought their rich heritage of liturgy and shared their ancient traditions.

Today, the World Council headquarters are located in Geneva, Switzerland. Contributions from member churches maintain its relatively small staff.

In America, Protestant churches formed the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, in 1908. Then, in 1950, this group was enlarged and made stronger as the National Council of Churches. The Episcopal Church did not belong to the Federal Council, but it is a member of the National Council.

The Council's headquarters are in New York City, and it has fostered cooperation in many types of important projects. For instance, the National Council holds the copyright for the Revised (RSV) and New Revised Standard Versions (NRSV) of the Bible.

For a quarter of a century or so, beginning in 1962, the Episcopal Church was active in the Consultation on Church Union, involving as many as nine American denominations at various times.

Meanwhile, another kind of unity effort has been occurring, under the label of "bilateral discussions." Examples are dialogues between:

Anglicans and Orthodox (from 1966); Anglicans and Reformed (from 1978); Anglicans and Roman Catholics (1980s); Anglicans and Lutherans (1980s); and Anglicans and Methodists (1990s).

Still, the world's churches must travel a long way together before they will be “one flock” under the one Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

9. The Holy Spirit

In this Treasurebook, Part IV, we have dipped into just a few of the great themes of Church history:

- Defining our *beliefs* in the form of Creeds.
- Developing liturgies for our *worship*.
- Undergoing *reformation* when needed.
- Preserving and translating the *Bible*.
- Moving out to settle the wider *world*.
- Sending *missionaries* to share the gospel.
- Working for *peace, justice, and human dignity*.
- Seeking Christian *unity*.

The Church's history is rich with the stories of men and women who lived in faith and gave themselves fully to the cause of Jesus Christ.

It is important to remind ourselves over and over again that the Church began on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles (*Acts, ch. 1*).

In Jesus' day, faithful Jews celebrated Pentecost for two reasons: It was the season of harvest in Palestine, and it was a time for celebrating the gift of the Ten Commandments, on Mt. Sinai. The Spirit of God was powerfully present at that historic moment in the story of Israel. The Law of Moses brought new light and meaning to human existence. Again and again, the psalmists and the prophets reminded their people to obey the commandments of God.

The apostles were faithful Jews. What would they have thought when they heard the rush of a mighty wind and felt flames descending upon their heads? This dramatic experience of the Holy Spirit surely must have struck them as an event to be compared with what happened to Moses.

Indeed, the apostles' mission to proclaim the good news of Christ's resurrection was an even greater gift from God than the one Moses had received!

Their story still unfolds as stated in these words from the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one holy catholic and *apostolic* Church.
—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 359

In each successive generation, the Church is the same Body of Christ, from the first Day of Pentecost until today.

As our dips into history have shown, Christians sin and fail repeatedly. But the Holy Spirit inspires and corrects the Church. Through the voices and daily lives of faithful baptized people, the Lord still speaks good news to the world.