

Times and Seasons

Common Worship

Church House Publishing

Times and Seasons

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Introduction

Times and Seasons: the Christian Year

The purpose of this volume is to provide the parishes and other Christian communities of the Church of England with resources to celebrate the times and seasons of the Christian year.

Christ died once for all for our salvation, on a particular date in human history. His death, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews insists, is a unique and unrepeatable event. But this event, like his incarnation and his resurrection, which are also events in the stream of history, transcends history: it is one day and every day. Every day is both Good Friday and Easter Day, because Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are present to us every day. It is hard to comprehend so much eternal reality in a single day, and it is not surprising that the first Christians should, almost from the beginning, have celebrated the mystery of the Lord's passion on a particular day, the weekly anniversary of his resurrection. Over time, an annual cycle of commemoration was laid over the rhythm of the week. This provided the Church with a way of meditating deeply on the successive episodes of Christ's saving life and death, from his conception in Mary's womb, through his death and resurrection, to his ascension to his place at the right hand of the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit promised by him. Other kinds of Christian commemoration have been added to the Christian year – originally, those of the apostles and martyrs, who had in a distinctive way witnessed to the passion of Christ.

The liturgical year thus provides a structure for the Church's collective memory, a way of consecrating our human experience of time in the celebration of God's work – in Christ and in human beings made holy through Christ – a work which is both unrepeatably in time and incomprehensibly beyond time. It asserts a Christian understanding of time as a context of God's grace, against the world's purely functional reckoning of time. This act of Christian remembering has proved, over time, to have an extraordinary depth. Through the structuring of our Christian memory, the past is able to come into our present, in a process of *anamnesis* (only weakly translated by our English 'remembrance'):

Paschal Lamb, thine Offering, finished
once for all when thou wast slain,
in its fullness undiminished
shall for evermore remain.

(G. H. Bourne)

This powerfully creative remembering has deep roots in Jewish tradition, and especially in the Passover meal. The shared preparation and consumption of this meal is a memorial action (*zikkaron*; cf Exodus 12.14 and 13.9), through which God's redemptive power in the past act of the Exodus can be freshly experienced in the present.

The rhythm of the Church's times and seasons also affects those who take part in them. It is one of the primary ways in which Christians learn, and are strengthened in their grasp of, the story of Christ – just as Jesus himself was familiar with the Jewish festivals, and with the way that the annual remembrance of Passover shaped the identity of the chosen people. One of the essential features of this educative remembering is that we imagine ourselves, in our act of worship, to experience events in the past as present reality or future hope. We speak naturally at Advent of looking forward to the birth of the Christ-child, and we experience the joy of his birth as a present reality, though we know in our minds that it is an event in the past.

Times and Seasons: **the Scope and Contents of the Volume**

Inevitably, space has imposed limitations even within a large book. This collection concentrates on the major liturgical cycles of the Christian year, especially from Advent to Candlemas and from Lent to Easter (of which Pentecost is seen as the conclusion). To these, together with festivals of long observance in the Western Church such as Trinity Sunday, is added a collection of resources for the festivals and seasons of the agricultural year and resources for the Embertide seasons, when prayer is offered for the ministry of the Church and for vocations. The relation between the liturgical calendar and the folk calendar is complex, and Christians were often skilful in adapting, and so to speak 'baptizing', already ancient popular customs. We see this clearly in the way that the imagery of light becomes progressively more prominent in the traditions of Christmas the further north one travels. The agricultural seasons have been intimately connected with the rhythms of the English Church for so long that we have included them in this volume. There are, however, important areas that do not find a place in it.

- ¶ The social and economic needs of the city do not fit obviously into an annual cycle in the way that the rhythms of the agricultural year do, and the pace of urban change is so rapid that we have not devised a corresponding set of urban liturgies. This is work well worth doing by others.
- ¶ We have not included material for the ever-increasing number of Sundays that are designated to some special cause, or area of ministry. These do not form part of the Church's collective memory in the same way as Ascension Day or Ash Wednesday, or even the more recent Bible Sunday, and they are best left to local judgement and private initiative. It is not difficult for those who wish to keep any of these special Sundays to find the materials they need.

- ¶ We have limited ourselves to the provision of material for use in churches and designated places of worship. It would clearly be possible – indeed, desirable – for there to be resources to help Christians to observe the times and seasons of the Christian year in homes or workplaces. This need can be met elsewhere.
- ¶ Nor have we (with a few exceptions) included material with a particular view to its use at services where children are present. We would again encourage others to meet this need.

This book contains liturgical material for the seasons of the Christian Year and for the principal feasts and holy days from which they take their character. A companion volume, *Common Worship: Festivals*, contains liturgical texts for the festivals of the Christian Year, principally those of the saints.

This collection incorporates and revises much that is already in use in the Church of England in three publications: *Lent, Holy Week and Easter* (1986), *The Promise of His Glory* (1991) and *Enriching the Christian Year* (1993). Again, limits of space have meant that not everything in those collections can be reproduced here; and room has also had to be made for additional material, where the earlier volumes did not cover a portion of the year or where the experience of using them has suggested a need for additional provision.

The provision for each season is of broadly three kinds. There is a collection of individual elements, such as proper prefaces, intercessions and acclamations, which can be inserted as appropriate into a service of Holy Communion or a Service of the Word. There are outlines of services, which show how particular building blocks can be put together into an appropriate structure. Finally, there is a small number of fully worked-out services.

The volume has been designed for use by those who are putting services together, rather than for direct use at the lectern or holy table. The ‘short passages of Scripture’ can be used to encourage reflection at various points in the service, especially in a Service of the Word; they are not intended to revive the practice of starting a service of Holy Communion with a sentence of Scripture, rather than with the invocation of the Trinity and the greeting of the people by the president. The widespread use of ‘dismissal Gospels’ is a response to the recent rediscovery of the way in which the conclusion of the service can be used to emphasize the missionary implications of worship. As God’s people are sent out from the celebration, they take with them the command of the gospel to spread the good news, and to be salt for the world.

Codes for Seasonal Material

For easy reference to the seasonal material, individual items have been allocated a code – for example, Adv.A1.

The first part of the code is a 'season marker'. Each section or sub-section of the book has either a three-letter code (indicating a season, period or theme) or a two-letter code (indicating a Sunday, Festival or occasion). These are printed in the top corner of each right-hand page in the section or sub-section concerned.

The second part of the code consists of a letter (indicating the type of material – for example, Invitations to Confession, Kyrie Confessions, and so on) and an individual number. These are printed in the left-hand margin next to the item concerned.

Key to Season Markers

| | |
|------------|---------------------------|
| Adv | Advent |
| Chr | Christmas |
| NYr | New Year |
| Epi | Epiphany |
| EpU | Epiphany: unity |
| EpM | Epiphany: mission |
| Lnt | Lent |
| Pas | Passiontide and Holy Week |
| CE | Chrim Eucharist |
| EL | Easter Liturgy |
| Eas | Easter |
| Asc | Ascension to Pentecost |
| TS | Trinity Sunday |
| CC | Corpus Christi |
| DF | Dedication Festival |
| BS | Bible Sunday |
| Asa | All Saints to Advent |
| CK | Christ the King |
| Cre | Creation |
| PS | Plough Sunday |
| Rog | Rogationtide |
| Lam | Lammas tide |
| Har | Harvest |
| Emb | Embertide |

Authorization

The following material is authorized pursuant to Canon B 2 of the Canons of the Church of England for use until further resolution of the General Synod:

- † The Calendar
- † Rules to Order the Christian Year
- † Texts marked † in the list of sources
- † Affirmation of Faith (page 100)
- † Certain texts included in the services

The following form of service has been approved by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York pursuant to Canon B 4 for use within their respective provinces:

- † A Service for Remembrance Sunday

The remaining material in *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* has been commended by the House of Bishops of the General Synod for use by the minister in exercise of his or her discretion under Canon B 5 of the Canons of the Church of England. (The following texts are commended for use when an authorized confession is not required: Chr.D1, EpU.C1, EpU.D1, EpU.D2, Eas.D1.)

