

Guide to the Daily Office Lectionary

A “lectionary” is a schedule of assigned Scripture readings. There are two lectionaries in the Book of Common Prayer: one for the Eucharist on Sundays & Holy Days; the other for the Daily Office, which we’ll explain here.

When Abp. Thomas Cranmer compiled the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549, he laid out a Daily Office lectionary that covered almost the entire Bible every year. The current lectionary covers almost all the New Testament every year and about half the Old Testament over a 2-year cycle.

Year 1 or Year 2?

Instructions for the Daily Office lectionary can be found on pp. 934-935. The schedule itself starts on page 936 & follows a 2-year cycle. The cycle begins on the first Sunday of Advent (early December or late November) because the Church calendar doesn’t line up perfectly with the secular calendar. Year 1 starts in Advent of even-numbered years; Year 2 in Advent of odd-numbered years. For example, in 2019 (odd-numbered), the Daily Office lectionary begins Year 2 in Advent. This continues into 2020 until it switches to Year 1 in Advent 2020 (an even-numbered year).

In the Daily Office lectionary, Year 1 readings are always on the left-hand page; Year 2 readings are always on the right-hand page.

Numbered Propers

In the season after Pentecost until the start of the new liturgical year in Advent, readings are organized according to numbered “Propers,” which are assigned based on fixed dates. Each Proper says “*Week of the Sunday closest to __*” which you can use to figure out what Proper applies to the week you’re in. So if Sunday’s date is September 13, then that week you would use the readings for Proper 19 (pp. 984 & 985).

Holy Days

Some days break from this pattern! On special feast days, the daily schedule is interrupted, even though there are normal readings assigned for the day in the lectionary. There are rules on page 15 about Principal Feasts & Holy Days that interrupt the normal schedule. But it may be easier to consult the monthly schedule beginning on page 19. The days highlighted in bold are Holy Days with their own readings, starting on page 996.

Most Holy Days have specific readings for each of the Offices, usually 2 for Morning Prayer and 2 for Evening Prayer. Some feasts also have readings appointed for Evening Prayer the night before.

The Readings

Three Scripture passages are appointed for most days. A reading from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament & one from a Gospel. These are split between Morning & Evening prayer, with flexibility in how you divvy up the readings.

For simplicity’s sake, we recommend reading the Old & New Testament readings for Morning Prayer and the Gospel at Evening Prayer. If you want 2 readings for both Morning and Evening, you can use the Old Testament reading from the alternate year as the first reading at Evening Prayer.

Choosing the Psalms of the Day

There are 2 ways of selecting the psalms of the day. The Daily Office lectionary lists two sets of psalms for each day, separated by a diamond dingbat. The psalm(s) before the separation should be used for Morning Prayer; the other psalm(s) should be used for Evening Prayer. This lectionary cycle takes you through most of the Psalter in about 7 to 8 weeks, jumping around a bit.

The other psalm cycle is the one introduced by Archbishop Cranmer with the first Book of Common Prayer. It covers the entire Psalter, straight through, in a 30-day cycle. Instead of tracking with the week or liturgical season, this cycle is based on the date. In the Psalter (p. 585) there are sections headings like *"Sixteenth Day: Evening Prayer."* So in this example, those Psalms (82-85) would be prayed with Evening Prayer on the 16th of the month. Then the next morning, you would pray Psalms 86-88 (*"Seventeenth Day: Morning Prayer"*). When a Holy Day interrupts the lectionary, use the psalms that are appointed for that feast, because they're usually related topically to the day. On the 31st of a month, you can fill in with the sections that got bumped by any Major Feasts that happened that month. Or you can just repeat a favorite section.

This 30-day cycle is harder to find at first, but we recommend it both because it involves less skipping around and because it gives you more exposure to the Psalms. It only takes a couple minutes longer each day than the lectionary cycle.

About SSNF

The Society of Saint Nicholas Ferrar is a devotional society of Christians in the Anglican Communion, dedicated to the practice and promotion of the Daily Office.

This spiritual practice was historically central to the Anglican tradition but has fallen out of use in most parishes over the past century. By leading through example and creating instructional guides, SSNF seeks to rekindle a love for this treasure of our tradition.

Find out more at stnicholasferrar.com.



Don't Miss the "Forest"

The lectionary readings are easily the most complicated part of the Daily Office. And even once you get used to finding what's appointed for a given day, the readings can dominate our experience of the Daily Office. After all, they take up a sizeable chunk of the time that it takes to pray the Office.

But it's important not to miss the forest for the trees. The readings are just one part of the Daily Office. Yes, an important part—but much of the beauty of the Office lies in the way its parts move in concert with one another. The Readings inform the how we see the Canticles, and they in turn shape how we pray the Psalms. So as you figure out the lectionary, just remember they're not the be-all and end-all of the Office.

Useful Pages

Morning Prayer (Rite I)	37	Evening Prayer (Rite I)	61
		Collects (Rite I)	159
Morning Prayer (Rite II)	75	Evening Prayer (Rite II)	115
Noonday Prayer (Rite II)	103	Compline (Rite II)	127
		Collects (Rite II)	211
Daily Office Rubrics (Rules)	141	Psalms	585
Prayers & Thanksgivings	814	Daily Office Lectionary	934