T H E
L I T U R G I C A L
C A L E N D A R :
T H E S E A S O N S
A N D Y E A R S
U N F O L D

articularly dramatic in the reformulation of Scripture undertaken by the interdenominational scholars of the Second Vatican Council was the scheduling of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John into a cycle where each year would focus on essentially one writer's account of Jesus' life, with some "sprinkling" of John's account in each.

Assigned in the Cycle as Year A- Matthew, Year B, Mark, and Year C, Luke, each year's readings take on a different twist, a different cast, reflecting the personality and experience of the year's primary writer.

atthew's Gospel, the longest and with the most direct account of Jesus' teaching, shows the perspective of the ex-tax-collector, originally despised by Jew and Gentile alike. A Jew, living in Israel who, probably in his own dying years, saw the destruction of Jerusalem, and the clear division between the Jewish sect which believed in Jesus

as the Messiah, and the more traditional majority which did not.

An original disciple and eyewitness to the experience of Jesus, Matthew focuses on two main themes: The fulfillment of Hebrew scripture in the person of Jesus, and, from that, the New Mission of Jesus as Messiah.

Matthew teaches in the Rabbinic tradition, using the technique of midrash, scholarly biblical analysis, to make clear his case for the Jewish Covenant being brought to fulfillment in Jesus.

ark's Gospel, the shortest, the earliest written account (penned around the year 60 of the Common Era, some 20 years before Matthew and Luke's), and the source from which Matthew and Luke clearly drew), is written from Rome, to Romans, former pagans who made up a church bitterly persecuted by the state.

His perspective is of Jesus as spiritual conqueror, vanquisher of evil, healer of ills.

Speaking and writing in Aramaic, Latin and Greek, Mark stresses the Universal Grace of God, in contrast to Matthew's focus on the Covental Bond between God and the people of Israel.

A traveling companion of Paul, born Saul, a persecutor of Christians-turned-founding missionary-and-luminary of this new faith who traveled from Jerusalem to the distant lands of Persia, Mark addressed and reached an audience much broader than that of Matthew.

uke, writes his account as a gentile, a Syrian pysician. By culture a Greek, he lives in, and speaks to, the Hellenistic world, bringing the perspective of an educated, accomplished man who sees himself as a citizen of a broad and culturally diverse Universe.

His account of Jesus' life is the most complete, and, with the most detail. As a healer, Luke's reportage stresses the reconciliatory nature of Jesus' ministry and teaching. He reminds readers of Jesus' call to mercy, forgiveness, generosity, inclusivity.

Though the theme of justice is central in all the Gospels, Luke's account is the strongest in its condemnation of injustice, inequity, greed, and, the marginalization of women.

These three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark

and Luke, are categorized as the Synoptic (think "synopsis") writers. The thrust of their writing is the accounting to us of what Jesus said and what he did while he walked this planet.

The Evangelist John's tack is markedly different. As the visionary, the Poet of the Gospels, John is concerned less with the facts and more with the overriding truth of what Christians see as this timeless God's intimate presence in human history. There's a wonderful Rabbinical saying about truth: "Truth is too important to be limited to the facts." While the Synoptics tell us a lot about what Jesus said, John lets us know more of why he said it, and what it means in the bigger picture. John celebrates Christ's humanity, seeing it not as a contradiction, an inconvenience to the Spirit, but as the crucible into which God's loving presence is poured and made most tangible. John's reminders do more than point to Jesus' successful blending of his divine and human natures-- they challenge us to fully and joyfully embrace ours.

Moving beyond enhancing the accessibility and impact of the scriptural readings, it became ever more clear at the Council how elementally important it was that lay persons have an adult, informed and

intelligent understanding not only of the scriptures, but the rituals, the gestures, the elements of the sacraments and worship services that make up what is called "The Liturgy" as well. With this in mind, the Council also took on the sweeping tasks of translating all the Liturgy from the ancient ceremonial language of Latin into the various languages of the modern world, and reforming the Liturgical Year, the calendar by which the feasts and seasons of the year are celebrated.

The Council saw the need to acknowledge a much closer connection between the Church Year, and the organic ebb and flow of the seasons of nature. With that revelation came a deeper understanding of the similarities in the rhythms and timing of the feasts and practices of Christianity and of the other Great Religious Traditions.

How did that theory translate into practice? The following chart illustrates the intersection of the Natural Seasons, the Post Vatican II Christian

## **AUTUMN**

## WINTER

**ADVENT** Harvest Festival (Native American) Eid al Fitr (Islam) **Bodhi Day** (Buddhist) Ramadan begins (Islam) Hanukkah (Jewish) Yom Kippur (Jewish) Christmas Day (Cfhristian) Epiphany (Christian) Ganesh Chaturthi (Hindu) Maghi (Si\kh) Rosh Hashanah (Jewish) Tu B'shvat (Jewish) Tisha B'av (Jewish) Vasant Panchami (Hindu) CHRISTMAS PENTECOST Nirvans Day (Buddhist) Purim - Jewish Maha Shivarati (Hindu) Guru Purnima (Hindu) Sun Dance (Native American) Shavuot (Jewish) Maple Festival (Native American) Green Corn Festival (Native American) EASTER Passover (Jewish) Buddha Day (Buddhist) Baisakhi (Sikh) Yom HaSho'ah (Jewish)

**SUMMER** 

**SPRING**