

The Church descends from the Mount of Transfiguration into the valley of death. During *Lent*, the Forty Days of Fasting, the Church remembers in Word and Sacrament, in liturgy and ceremony, and in her own penitence and fasting, the God Who suffered and died, that we might have peace and life.

And what parish that lives the Church Year has not felt the surge of joy as the bells of *Easter* ring out, and God's People come to the altar to receive the Body and Blood of the risen and glorified Christ? Here indeed is the high point of the Church's Year of Grace.

From the pinnacle of joy the Church soars with Alleluias through the Easter cycle. On *Ascension Day*, she stands with the Apostles gazing after the ascended Christ. And she gives praise and thanksgiving to God on *Pentecost* for the coming of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Then for almost half a year, the Church concentrates on her life in Christ during the weeks after the Feast of the *Holy Trinity*. For her life of love is the thankful response that the Church gives to God for His work of redemption.

This is what the Church Year is: a year lived with Christ; indeed, a Year of Grace!



## What is this Church Year?

As every Christian knows, God governs His creation by a phenomenon that we call "time." Every act of God that has been revealed to man has taken place within time. The Church Year is a recognition of that fact. When God's Holy People follow the Church Year, they are acknowledging the fact that God has revealed Himself and His plan of salvation in a series of acts and events within time. The Church Year helps us to remember this series of events as it follows God's plan of salvation in the life and work of Jesus Christ.

## A Year of Grace

But there is more. The Church Year is much more than an historical survey of the life of Christ. It is a year of grace, because it is a means which the Church has chosen to make God's plan of salvation a present reality to the worshipping congregation. As God's Family follows this Church Year it is brought face to face with what God is doing, here and now, for His People, in Word and Sacrament and Liturgy. The Church's Year, the Year of Grace, presents to us "the whole counsel of God" each and every year.

A parish which does not deliberately and consciously follow the Christian Church Year, more often than not, is subjected to the personal whims and

pet peeves of the individual Pastor. Often God's plan of redemption is lost in a shuffle of "Loyalty Sundays," "Rally Days," "Mothers' Fathers' and Children's Days," and "We-need-more-money Sundays."

On the other hand, the parish that follows the Church Year is confronted each week with a new aspect of God's redeeming love, as Pastor and people review in order what God has done and is doing for their salvation.

## The Church Year in Brief

The Church Year begins four Sundays before Christmass with the season of Advent. During *Advent*, the Church prepares in somber, yet joyful, anticipation for the coming of Christ in glory. At the same time, she remembers His continual coming to His People in the Blessed Sacraments and in His Holy Word.

In the *Christmass* cycle, the Church receives the newborn Infant cradled in the chalice and paten of the Holy Eucharist and offers her praise and thanksgiving to God becoming a Man for our salvation. The Christmass season reaches a climax in the *Epiphany* cycle, where the Infant in the manger is gloriously revealed as God Incarnate. The Church receives Him in all the splendor of His divine glory.