

Christian Liturgical Calendar

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The word liturgy comes from a Greek word meaning "work of the people." The term refers to the entire order of worship and is generally used in churches where the congregation performs parts of the worship service by speaking or praying in unison. Life is a process through which we are continually evolving through cycles within ever increasing cycles. The Liturgical Calendar is a path, a journey, a series of services, ceremonies, rituals and public worship that follows a yearly cycle of birth, life, death and resurrection through Jesus the Christ. In the Methodist tradition the calendar runs in a three year cycle with scripture lessons covering the majority of the Bible and hopefully raising our understanding and faith in the process.

Liturgical colors are a part of the rituals/services throughout the year. These colors are not just about their ritual or ceremonial use. We experience colors: they set a mood and create an attitude. There is a direct connection that exists between the brain and the body creating reactions that take place independently of thought or deliberation. Colors often have different symbolic meanings in different cultures and reactions to colors are a combination of biological, physiological, psychological, social and cultural factors. Color energies even seem to transcend seeing. One hypothesis is that neurotransmitters in the eye transmit information about light to the brain even in the absence of sight. This information releases a hormone in the hypothalamus that has numerous effects on our moods, mental clarity and energy level.

Advent Sundays	Purple
Christmas Eve/Day though Epiphany	White
Time after Epiphany to Lent	Green
Baptism of Jesus & the Transfiguration	White
Ash Wednesday through Maundy Thursday	Purple
Good Friday	No color /Black
Easter Sunday through Ascension to Pentecost	White
Pentecost	Red
Time after Pentecost to Advent	Green
Trinity Sunday & Christ the King Sunday	White

Green: Green suggests hope, life and our natural association is to springtime and growth. Green makes people feel comfortable and has been used as a healing color.

Purple: In antiquity, purple dye was very rare, so it came to signify wealth and power as indicated in the expression "born to the purple". King's robes are generally purple as it is considered to be a color of royalty and as such, commands respect.

White: White indicates innocence and triumph, sophistication and refinement; it represents purity and ultimate truth. Encompassing all colors, it signifies perfection and completion.

Red: Red is the color of fire, passion and blood. It suggests courage and vitality. It takes the human eye longer to process red than any other color. It is an emotionally charged color that can make your heart beat faster.

Black: Black is the ultimate power color showing dignity and strength. For the deepest grief and mourning and as a symbol of death, the somberness of black is used by Western peoples. It is no color, the beginning or the void from which all things come.

The pink candle sometimes used on the 3rd Sunday of Advent comes from an old Catholic tradition originally used during Lent which was moved eventually to Advent.

The calendar is divided in four parts:

- Advent to Christmas through Epiphany
- Time after Epiphany
- Lent to Easter through Pentecost
- Kingdomtide (Time after Pentecost)

Advent to Christmas through Epiphany

Advent



Christmas



Epiphany



Baptism
of the Lord



Transfiguration
of the Lord



Advent means “coming”, anticipating the Coming of the Lord. The four Sundays before Christmas are called Advent Sundays and are a time to prepare for Christ coming into our lives and into our world. In the Catholic Church they celebrate first ardent Love, then the virtue of Hope, spiritual Joy and intense Desire. In the Protestant Churches the sequence varies but generally follows the sequence of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

At **Christmas** we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus. For Christians the principal purpose of the Christmas cycle is to remind us of the radical transformation effected in our human life. By coming into this world to take upon Himself our human nature, God’s own Son did not merely become one of us; He gave us the power of becoming real children of God. A new race, a holy people, whom He, with his Divine Life, leads to the heavenly throne.

Christmas began in Rome as a response to pagan festivals centering around the Winter Solstice, which at that time was December 25th. The pagan celebration established by the Roman Emperor Aurelian in 274 AD was called “The Birth of the Invincible Sun” or “The Mystic Midnight Sun.” In 335 AD, Roman Christians began to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus Christ on December 25th to assert their Christian faith during the pagan feast, with January 1st as the day of Holy Name which commemorates Jesus’ circumcision, when he was give his name, according to Jewish tradition. Luke 2:21-23.

Generally misunderstood as being the days before Christmas, the Twelve Days of Christmas start after Christmas Day and end at Epiphany. The eighth day, January 1st is Naming and Purification Day of Jesus.

Epiphany is a festival held on January 6th or the first Sunday of the new year, which commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi; also called the Twelfth Night. The word epiphany means an appearance or manifestation, as of a deity or a moment of sudden intuitive understanding or a flash of insight.

Time After Epiphany

Sometimes called Ordinary Time, the word ordinary refers to ordinal, meaning counted time. It is not meant to imply common or mundane time. It is a time of transition from the joy of Christmas to the sorrow of Lent. The time after Epiphany is when we reflect upon the events of the life of Jesus and how these events have significance today, both as a church and within our individual lives. The length of this season varies each year from four to nine Sundays, depending upon how early or late Easter falls in a given year. The first Sunday after the Epiphany is the **Baptism of the Lord** and the last Sunday before the beginning of Lent is the **Transfiguration of the Lord**.

Baptism of the Lord is the first Sunday after Epiphany which celebrates the baptism by John the Baptist and where Jesus commits himself to the service of God. This is the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Matthew 3:11 John 1: 19-28

Transfiguration of the Lord is the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday where we celebrate the Transfiguration of Jesus with Elijah and Moses, and the beginning of the Resurrection story. The Transfiguration, a radical change in appearance, is a theophany - a manifestation of God - showing Christ’s divinity through the display of His uncreated, divine light. The Transfiguration is the culminating point of His public life, as His Baptism is its starting point, and His Ascension its end. Only in Luke is it explained that Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah about his departure which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Matthew 17:1-6, Mark 9:1-8, and Luke 9:28-36, while Peter and John, two of the privileged witnesses, allude to it in II Peter 1:16-18 and John in John 1:14.

Lent to Easter through Pentecost

Ash Wednesday



Easter



Pentecost



Trinity Sunday



Christ the King



Lent is the period of forty days, excluding Sundays, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, observed annually as a season of fasting, penitence and self-denial. Lent was fixed at forty days in the 8th century, the number forty having religious significance in the Bible. It is the period of prayer and self-denial in preparation of Easter. The term “Lent” comes from the old Anglo Saxon word “lenctern”, which meant spring.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, where the ashes of the palm fronds from Palm Sunday of the previous year are smeared on the foreheads of penitents symbolizing contrition and repentance.

Palm Sunday is also known as Passion Sunday, meaning sorrows. Originally in the Catholic Church the fifth Sunday of Lent was Passion Sunday. In 1970 Passion Sunday was changed to the sixth Sunday of Lent, the same as Palm Sunday, and caused considerable confusion. The entire week before Easter was re-designated and Holy Week became the Week of Passion.

Palm Sunday begins Holy Week. In some churches, palm fronds are blessed outside the church building, and a procession enters with singing to re-enact the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. These palms are saved to be burned later as the source of ashes used in Ash Wednesday services.

Holy Week is the last week of Lent when we are filled with a mixture of anticipation and sorrow with each day having significance.

- **Holy Monday** commemorates Jesus’ cleansing of the temple, when he assaulted money changers and overturned their tables; Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:12, Luke 19:45.
- **Holy Tuesday** recalls Jesus’ description to his disciples on the Mount of Olives about the destruction of Jerusalem. Signs of the End of the Age; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.
- **Holy Wednesday**, once called Spy Wednesday, recalls Judas’ decision to betray Jesus in exchange for 30 pieces of silver. Matthew 26:14; Luke 22:1-6.
- **Maundy Thursday** commemorates the last Jewish Passover Feast of Jesus known as the Last Supper to Christians. Matthew 26: 17-30, Mark 14: 12-20, Luke 22: 17-38, John: 13: 1-17 “Maundy” is derived from the Latin “mandatum” - a commandment of God. In addition to the commandment “Do this in remembrance of me” there are two others within this time period; John 13:3-7 where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and commands them to do the same. And in John 13:34-35 a new commandment of Love is given.
- **Good Friday** recalls Jesus’ death on the cross with the crucifixion representing the giving up of the individual personality and learning to live daily by the spiritual laws.
- **Holy Saturday** is the final day of Holy Week and of Lent. It is the dark night of the soul, a time of soul searching, of accepting and assimilating all we have learned since Ash Wednesday.

Easter Sunday, the day of Resurrection, falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 20th, the nominal date of the Spring Equinox, and can fall on any date from March 22nd to April 25th, a year-to-year sequence that is so complicated it takes 5.7 million years to repeat.

Early Christians observed a Christian Passover, in the Spring of the year. Adapted from Jewish Passover, it was a festival of redemption and commemorated both the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the vehicle for God’s grace. For the Jewish, the Seder meal marks the beginning of Passover and involves a retelling of the story of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. Many Gentile converts were hesitant to adopt the Jewish festival, especially since the Jerusalem Council had decided that Gentile converts to Christianity did not have to observe Jewish religious practices. A Christian Seder is now used in many churches on Maundy Thursday which recognizes the change that Jesus made for the salvation of believers.

By the fourth century Easter moved into a distinctively Christian celebration of the Resurrection, with Good Friday commemorating Jesus' crucifixion and death. In the early church, converts were baptized into church membership on this day after a lengthy period of instruction. This tradition continues today in some churches. The name "Easter" possibly originated with the name of an ancient Goddess Eostre. She was the Great Mother Goddess of the Saxon people in Northern Europe. Her name was derived from the ancient word for spring, "eastre."

Following Easter Sunday until Pentecost, Jesus visits the disciples many times. Three are mentioned specifically and celebrated in many churches.

- **First Visitation to the Apostles:** John 20:19-25 The day following Easter, known as Easter Monday, commemorates the first visitation of Jesus to the apostles which was unexpected and after which, Thomas not being present, avowed his skepticism.
- **Second Visitation to the Apostles:** John 20:26-31 The first Sunday after Easter is called Low Sunday because of the final removal of the white robes that are used by the persons being prepared for Baptism at Easter. This is the second visitation and the first planned visit to the disciples by Jesus, where Thomas was present and believed.
- **Third Visitation to the Apostles:** John 21:1-19 The third visitation at the Sea of Tiberias Jesus charges the Apostles with their ministry.

Ascension Day marks the bodily ascent of Christ into heaven and is commemorated the fortieth day after Easter, also called Holy Thursday. The church has accepted the account in Acts 1:1-11 and Luke 24:50-53 and although tradition states that it was first celebrated in the year 68 AD, it did not become formally recognized by the church until the late 3rd century.

The Easter Season ends at **Pentecost**, a celebration occurring seven weeks or 49 days after Easter Sunday. It recalls the visitation of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and the disciples in Acts 2:1-41. The day was originally a Jewish festival which was called "Pentecost" because it was observed 50 days after Passover. The Greek word for the 50th day is pentecoste. This is usually regarded as the date of the birth of the Christian church and the time of the Great Baptism. The celebration was mentioned in a 2nd century book and was formally recognized in the 3rd century.

Time after Pentecost

Also known as Kingdomtide, this time between Pentecost and Advent is less structured by tradition and can be a time when churches and individuals can be creative; a time for a greater understanding of the message of Jesus. The first Sunday after Pentecost is **Trinity Sunday** and the last Sunday before Advent is **Christ the King Sunday**.

Trinity Sunday commemorates the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The idea of the Holy Trinity has changed and evolved. It is a term employed to signify the central doctrine of the Christian religion. The word trias was found about AD 180 in Antioch describing God the Father, His Word and His Wisdom. It was first formulated in the 2nd century and received final sanction in the 4th century. Within the doxology the change is visible through history. After "Glory to God the Father, His Word and His Wisdom." it became "Glory to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit" and finally it changed it to "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit."

Christ the King Sunday is traditionally set aside as a celebration of the coming reign of Jesus Christ. Established by Pope Pius XI in 1925, the pontiff was witness to a turbulent time in the world's history. Secularism was on the rise and dangerous dictatorships were emerging in Europe and beyond. Christ had long been referred to as King, but Pope Pius and the Christian faithful saw the respect and reverence for Christ's authority waning in the midst of the unrest during the first part of the 20th century. In response, a feast was set with the intent to reaffirm and refocus faith and respect in the kingship of Jesus. While the problems our world faces today differ from the particular events that inspired Pope Pius XI, his message and call to honor Christ the King in a society that denies the authority of Our Lord is no less pertinent now than it was then. It is a transitional time. In acknowledging Jesus as Christ the King, we are crowning our year of study, growth, and change. It is a day of completion, the culmination of the liturgical year and a transition point to Advent where we prepare for a new beginning.