



THE CHURCH YEAR

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

The Church Year is designed around God's revelation to us in Christ, therefore the year begins with Advent and Christ's birth. The two major themes are the Christmas event and the Easter event.

HOW THE CHRISTIAN YEAR IS DETERMINED:

The sequence of festivals relating to the church year is determined by Easter which falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or following the vernal equinox, (the day which is the mid point between the shortest [Dec. 21st] and the longest day [June 21st] of the year. Because of this method of determining Easter Sunday, it makes it necessary to have an adjustable number of Sundays after Epiphany and Pentecost. This is why Easter does not fall on the same date each year.

ADVENT

Advent is the beginning of the church year.

Colors: blue which represents hope, or purple which represents royalty (a king is born)

Note: advent means "to prepare" - Matthew 3:3 "Prepare the way of the Lord." We prepare our hearts, our homes, our lives for the king of kings to be born soon.

Length: there are four weeks in advent, that is why some churches have the tradition of lighting one additional candle on the Christmas wreath during each week in advent; it is a way of marking time.

Many churches will have Advent worship services during each week of Advent.

CHRISTMAS

Christmas is the day we celebrate the birth of Christ [Luke 2:1-20].

Color: white which represents purity

Date: December 25

EPIPHANY

Epiphany means revelation. In the season of Epiphany we hear Scripture that show that this child, Jesus, is someone very special, the Son of God.

Color: the day of Epiphany is white (Jan. 6) and the Sundays in Epiphany are green.

Date: January 6. This is the day that traditionally we celebrate as the time the Wise Men came to worship the baby Jesus and present their gifts. This date is also the last of the 12 days of Christmas and so it is most appropriate that we leave our Christmas trees up until this day.

Length: up to 8 weeks

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Transfiguration is the time that Christ's figure (namely his face) is changed. It is the story of Jesus and three of his disciples (Peter, James, and John) going up on a mountain and a cloud overshadows them (God) and there appears with them, Moses (the giver of the Law) and Elijah (the greatest prophet) and the face of Jesus shines like the sun and his garments become dazzling white. [Matthew 17:1-9 or Mark 9:2-9 or Luke 9:28-36]

Color: white

Date: the last Sunday after the Epiphany

Length: one day

LENT

Lent also means preparation. It is a time for deep religious reflection as we prepare to hear the stories of Christ's death.

Color: purple for royalty

Length: 40 days (up to 5 weeks)

Many churches will have a Lenten worship service each week during Lent.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent. The color is black for Ash Wednesday and this is the day the church places ashes on one's forehead because ashes suggest cleaning and renewal. Ashes were once used as a cleaning agent in the absence of soap. Ashes suggest judgment and God's condemnation of sin. During the Ash Wed. Service we hear the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," and we are forcefully reminded of the words said during funerals: "earth, to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Ashes also symbolize death and renewal shown by the ancient custom of burning the fields in the spring to destroy the old and prepare for the new.

Shrove Tuesday - as a footnote, the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday is generally called Shrove Tuesday or Shrovetide. For Lent it is a custom for many to give up things they enjoy and so traditionally on Shrove Tuesday there may be one last celebration, hence Mardi Gras.

HOLY WEEK

This is the week preceding Easter and is considered the holiest week of the church year.

It is comprised of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday.

Palm Sunday, also known as The Sunday of the Passion, is the day the church celebrates Christ's entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The people lay palm branches onto the rough road to cushion the hooves, and they shout, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest," [Matthew 21:9] We sing these words before every Holy Communion.

Color: the color is red symbolizing Christ's blood about to be given on the cross. The church celebrates this day by giving out palm branches during the service.

Maundy Thursday, on this night, Jesus celebrates the Passover Meal with his disciples and changes the traditional ending to become what we celebrate today as Holy Communion. During the meal, Jesus gives a new mandate [hence the name

"Maundy Thursday"], or commandment, that they are to love one another as He loves them [John 15:12]. Later, Judas Iscariot leaves to gather the Roman soldiers. After praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas betrays Jesus and hands him over to the soldiers. Jesus is questioned all night in "court", stripped, whipped, spat upon, and condemned to death upon the cross [Mark 14:12-72]. On this night, many churches have a special worship service when the Passover/ Communion Meal is shared (some even celebrate the Jewish Seder Meal), and then all go silently into the sanctuary to strip the altar, symbolizing Christ's humanity stripped away.

Good Friday, on this day Jesus is crucified on the cross.

Color: the altar, cross, etc. is covered in black symbolizing death.

Many churches have a Good Friday service. The mood for this service is very somber.

EASTER

Easter Sunday is the day in the church year in which we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. So significant is this day, that we now worship on Sunday.

The Jewish Sabbath is from sundown on Friday till sundown on Saturday, but now we as Christians have our Sabbath on Sunday.

Color: white symbolizing the resurrection.

Sundays of Easter

Length: up to 7 weeks

Color: white

PENTECOST

The day of Pentecost is the day in which the church celebrates the giving of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:1-21 we read how the people were gathered and the Holy Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire.

Color: red for tongues of fire

Significance: It is on this day that many churches celebrate the Confirmation of their young people.

Length: "Penta" means 5, so Pentecost comes 50 days after Easter (not counting Sundays as each Sunday is a celebration of Easter.)

The Holy Trinity (first Sunday after Pentecost) is a Sunday that the church emphasizes God as three persons and yet is one. This theme of three in one is seen in Mark 1:9-11, a voice from heaven, beloved Son Jesus, and the Spirit descending like a dove.

Color: white

Length: this one Sunday

Note: The Athanasian Creed is most appropriate for this day as it emphasizes the Trinity.

Sundays after Pentecost

Color: green symbolizing growth for springtime

Length: up to 27 weeks

Note: this is the longest season in the church year

