

The Liturgical Year

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The liturgical church year consists of an organization of Scripture readings and liturgical emphases that tell the story of God's saving work in Jesus Christ in a recurring pattern. Within protestantism, the liturgical year has been organized in more than one way. At *Christ Church*, the liturgical year is divided into 7 distinct seasons. They are:

The Season of Advent

The Season of Christmas (sometimes called Christmastide)

The Season of Epiphany

The Season of Lent

The Season of Easter (sometimes called Eastertide)

The Season of Pentecost

The Season of Dominiontide

Liturgical Colors

Liturgical colors are used in paraments (draped cloths) hung over the altar and lecterns and in other ways (ministerial/choir stoles, etc.) to call attention to each particular season and its emphasis.

The variety of liturgical colors in the church arose from the mystical meaning attached to them in antiquity. Thus white, the symbol of light, typifies innocence and purity, joy and glory; red, the symbol of fire and blood, indicates the flames of the Holy Spirit and the blood of martyrs; green, the hue of plants and trees, bespeaks the hope of life eternal, as well as growth and vitality; violet (or purple), the gloomy cast of the mortified, denotes affliction, melancholy and penitence; while black, the universal emblem of mourning, signifies the sorrow of death and the somberness of the tomb.

Originally, these were the only colors used in the church. Now, however, many churches (including our own) sometimes use blue and gold, as well as other colors. Blue is used in Advent to symbolize the peace and joy that the birth of the long-awaited Messiah brings; gold is sometimes used at Easter and on Christ the King Sunday to signify the royalty of the risen King of kings. Specific colors used in our church will be indicated in the descriptions of seasons and days below.

The Advent Season (Liturgical color: blue)

The Christian year begins with the season of Advent, which starts on the Sunday nearest to November 30. The first Sunday may be as early as November 27, in which case Advent has 28 days, or as late as December 3, giving the season only 21 days.

The first of the four Sundays of Advent is the Church's New Year's Day. This season of preparation for the celebration of Christmas takes its name from the Latin, *ad-venio*, which means "to come to," referring to the coming of Christ. Church tradition has assigned two primary themes to this coming: The first coming, when Jesus Christ was born at Christmas; and, the second coming at the end of the world when Jesus Christ will return in judgment. Thus, the season mixes joy in the redemption that has already come with the sober awe of the judgment yet to come. Modern interpretation sometimes underscores a third aspect of the "coming" of Christ, emphasizing that Christ is even today "coming" — coming into our hearts by grace to redeem and sanctify us now. Thus, He comes to us continuously in Word and Sacrament.

In the ancient Church, Advent, like Lent, was a season of penitential preparation for baptism. Hence, the Church used the color violet (or purple) during Advent to symbolize the penitential aspect of the season. But, since the sixth century, Advent has been emphasized as the time of liturgical preparation for Christmas. Although the penitential character of the season has endured in some ways (e.g., in sober reflection on the judgmental aspects of Christ's second coming), Advent is primarily a season of solemn joy and anticipation. Therefore, many churches, including our own, now use the color blue during this season to emphasize the peace and joy that the anticipated Messiah brings.

The Christmas Season (Liturgical color: white)

Christmastide

Christmastide begins on the eve of December 24th and concludes on the eve of January 5th. Obviously, the highlight of this season is Christmas Day (the Feast of Christmas, December 25), on which the world remembers the incarnation of our Lord, that is, the assuming of human form by God in Jesus Christ. The *Book of Common Prayer* puts it this way: Christ "by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit was made perfect Man of the flesh of the Virgin Mary his mother;" and calls it "the mystery of the Word made flesh" (John 1:1).

Epiphany, January 6

According to the Church calendar, Christmastide is concluded on January 5 and the Epiphany of our Lord is celebrated on January 6. Technically, the Epiphany of our Lord, *proper*, is always celebrated on January 6, but practically, in our church, since we do not hold weekday services, the Epiphany is celebrated liturgically on the Sunday on or immediately before January 6.

The word, "epiphany," borrowed from the Eastern Church, is somewhat vague in meaning, but basically refers to the manifestation or revelation of the glory of Christ. The liturgy for Epiphany Day always emphasizes the Adoration of the Wise Men.

The Epiphany Season (Liturgical color: green, except for special days as indicated)

The Christmas Season officially ends with the celebration of Epiphany. The Epiphany season follows and varies in length according to the date of Easter. There are two special days within this season.

The Sunday immediately following the Epiphany is always celebrated as Baptism of the Lord Sunday, on which the epiphany or revelation of the glory of Christ manifested at his baptism is celebrated. The liturgical color for the Baptism of the Lord Sunday, like Epiphany Day, is always white in honor of the glory of the Christ on whom the Spirit descended. The last Sunday of the Epiphany Season (the Sunday immediately before Ash Wednesday) is always celebrated as Transfiguration Sunday, on which the epiphany or revelation of the transfigured glory of Christ is commemorated. The liturgical color for this special day is always white.

The liturgical color for all other Sundays in the Epiphany Season is green, denoting the growth of the glory of Christ's earthly ministry.

The Season of Lent (Liturgical color: purple)

From Ash Wednesday to Holy Week

The word, "Lent" is a derivative from the Anglo-Saxon word "lencten," referring to the time of year when the days "lengthen" with the coming of spring. Liturgically, the Season of Lent is a season of penance, reflection, and fasting which prepares us for Christ's Resurrection on Easter Day, through which we attain redemption.

The forty weekdays of Lent represent the period which Jesus spent in the wilderness during his temptations. According to Matthew and Luke he fasted for forty days. The symbolism of Lent, aside from Holy Week, centers on sin, temptation and penitence. Lent's liturgical color, violet (purple), stands for penitence.

The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday, on which day our bodies are marked with ashes to humble our hearts and remind us that life passes quickly away on Earth. We recall this when we are told in the liturgy of this day: "Remember, man is dust, and unto dust you shall return."

Ashes are a symbol of penance and they help us develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice. Traditionally, the ashes are made from the palms used in the Palm Sunday celebration of the previous year. They are a reminder that God is gracious and merciful to those who call on Him with repentant hearts. His divine mercy is of utmost importance during the season of Lent, and the Church calls on us to seek that mercy during the entire Lenten season with reflection, prayer and penance.

In the ancient Church, the season of Lent was a period of preparation for Easter baptism. During this time of instruction, the catechumen fasted and prayed. The climax came in the all-night vigil of Easter Evening with baptism and confirmation and the celebration of Christ's Resurrection. At a later time all church members joined in making Lent a penitential season of mourning for sin.

Holy Week (Liturgical color: purple, except for Palm Sunday and Good Friday)

Holy Week, a sub-season of Lent, embraces the last seven days before Easter. Liturgically, Holy Week focuses on the Gospel accounts of the Passion of Christ, including: the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the last Supper, the agony of Gethsemane, the betrayal and arrest of Christ, the hearings before the high Priest and Herod, the trial under Pontius Pilate, the scourging and mocking of Jesus by the soldiers, the carrying of the cross to Calvary, and the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

Special Observances During Holy Week

The week begins on Palm Sunday (sixth Sunday in Lent), the Sunday before Easter, marking the triumphant entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem for Passover, the end of Lent, *proper*, and the beginning of Holy Week and Christ's Passion.

From ancient times, palm-branches were symbols of victory and triumph. The Romans used to reward their champions of the games with palm-branches. Also military triumphs, and celebrations of victory, were observed with palms. It seems that the Jews followed the same custom of carrying palm-branches on their festive occasions. That is what happened during the solemn entry of Jesus into the Holy City before His last Passover.

In the New Testament, the palm-branches become a symbol of martyrdom, signifying victory over death. For this reason, in Christian art, martyrs were usually represented with palms in their hands. These branches were usually cut from date-palms.

Jesus Christ, after raising Lazarus, was finally recognized by the Jewish people as their Messiah. When He arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, they greeted Him with a triumphant welcome. The Evangelist, however, hastened to remark that it was done in fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

When the Apostles saw the enthusiastic crowds, they brought a donkey colt and made their Master ride upon it, while the people spread their cloaks and strewed branches from the trees on the road in front of Him. Others took branches of palms in their hands and, cheering, cried out: "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" As Jesus was entering the city, surrounded by the excited crowds, the Scribes and the Pharisees became alarmed and decided to stop Him at any cost. But the people kept acclaiming Him as their Messiah, saying, "This is the Prophet, Jesus from Nazareth, in Galilee!" From earliest times, the Christians in Jerusalem celebrated this event with great joy and solemnity, re-enacting

Christ's triumphant entry into their city. The liturgical color for this day is red, symbolizing the the festive nature of the procession into Jerusalem.

The service of Maundy Thursday (sometimes called Holy Thursday) solemnly commemorates the institution of the Lord's Supper and is the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week. From an early period, the service has been associated with the act of Jesus "Washing the Feet of His Disciples" in preparation for the Last Supper (John 13). Though our church does not practice "foot washing" as part of our liturgy for this day, the memory of this practice survives in the very name "Maundy" Thursday, derived from the Latin word, *mandatum*, the first word in the ancient liturgy of the washing of the feet.

Undoubtedly, however, the central rite of the day, the oldest of which we have explicit record, is the celebration of Communion. The service has also been distinguished from ancient times by the practice of the stripping and the washing of the altars in preparation for Good Friday.

The source of our term for the Friday before Easter, "Good Friday," is not clear. But what is clear is the liturgical focus of the day. There is, perhaps, no service in the whole liturgy so peculiar, so interesting, so composite, so dramatic as the service and ceremonial of Good Friday.

It is a day that proclaims God's purpose of loving and redeeming the world through the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is a day that is "good" because God was drawing the world to Himself in Christ. As seen in John's gospel, particularly, God was in control. God was not making the best of a bad situation, but was working out God's intention for the world — winning salvation for His people. We call it "good" because we look backward at the crucifixion through the unique perspective of Easter!

Nevertheless, the tone of the "Good Friday" liturgy is appropriately somber and mournful. Because the altars have been stripped in the Maundy Thursday services, usually no liturgical colors are used for this service. Where they are, black is the most appropriate color.

The Season of Easter (Liturgical color: white)

The *Apostles' Creed* says simply, "On the third day he rose again," and that is the liturgical focus of Easter Sunday and the Easter season which follows. Thus, the liturgical color appropriate to Easter Day and the Easter season is white, symbolizing the glory of the risen Christ and the joy of his redeemed people. Sometimes, Easter Day, the "crowing day of the liturgical year" is celebrated with gold paraments.

The Easter season is comprised of Easter Sunday and the 7 Sundays which follow, culminating in Ascension Sunday on which the Church commemorates the ascension of Christ to the "right hand of God the Father" in heaven.

The Season of Pentecost (Liturgical color: red except as indicated)

The Season of Pentecost begins with the Feast of Pentecost, always celebrated the Sunday following Ascension Sunday. The Christian Festival of Pentecost is based on the incident recounted in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit came upon the Christian disciples gathered in the upper room at Jerusalem seven weeks after Easter. The appearance was made known by a sound "like the rush of a mighty wind" and by a light in the form of tongues "as of fire, distributed and resting on each of them" (Acts 2:1-3).

The Jewish Pentecost which the disciples were celebrating at the time was the Feast of Weeks, a thanksgiving for the first fruits of the wheat harvest (Exodus 34:22). Later Christians, in their worship for this week, also remembered, by reading Numbers 11:24-30, the incident of the Spirit resting upon the seventy elders of Israel when they were in the wilderness with Moses.

Symbols appropriate to Pentecost are those indicating the appearance of God and his Holy Spirit. Chief among these is the dove. Red is the liturgical color used for the season of Pentecost (except Trinity Sunday) and it symbolizes the flames of fire seen at the time of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples in Jerusalem.

The Sunday immediately following Pentecost Sunday is always commemorated in the liturgy as Trinity Sunday, on which the Church celebrates the mystical nature of the triune essence of God. The liturgical color appropriate to Trinity Sunday is white.

The Season of Dominiontide (Liturgical color: green, except as indicated)

Dominiontide is the liturgical season observed in the late summer and autumn by our church, commencing on the last Sunday in August, giving the season 13 Sundays in some years and 14 in others. The last Sunday of Dominiontide (the Sunday immediately preceding the first Sunday of Advent) is designated as Christ the King Sunday (sometimes referred to as Reign of Christ Sunday.)

For this Sunday, the green color of Dominiontide general (used to symbolize the continual growth of Christ's spiritual kingdom) gives way to white or gold to honor the glorious and eternal reign of Christ.

The liturgy for Dominiontide tends to stress Christian charity and assistance to the poor, in contrast to the preceding season of Pentecost, when a more spiritual mission is generally emphasized.