

The Liturgical Year

THE CHURCH'S YEAR – THE LITURGICAL YEAR

All through the year the Church family celebrates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We also celebrate feasts and saints. In the following pages you will discover a description of each season or feast and an explanation of the appropriate liturgical colour.

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

Begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on December 24.

Advent has a twofold character. It is the season to prepare for Christmas, when Christ's first coming is remembered, and it is the season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. For these two reasons, the season of Advent is a period for devout and joyful expectation.

Liturgical Colour:

Violet

Symbolises joyful waiting, renewal and expectation

"Prepare the way for the coming of our God"

(adapted from Luke: 3:3)

THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

Begins on Christmas day and ends on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Christmas is a season, not a day. This is difficult to realise since the world wants to 'get back to normal' long before we have arrived at the last day of Christmas: the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. It is a season of true joy when we celebrate that 'God-is-with-us' – Emmanuel! The colour and vibrancy of our Christmas celebrations should inform a very deep part of ourselves that something wonderful has happened, that Christ is born, and the world will never be the same again.

The Word was made flesh and lived among us. (John 1:14)

Liturgical Colour:

White or gold

Symbolises true joy and triumph

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

This feast is celebrated on the Sunday nearest to the 6th January

The Epiphany of the Lord is one of the greatest feasts in the Church's year and in many parts of the world it is celebrated as the most joyful day of Christmastime. The word 'epiphany' means 'showing'. We rejoice that the glory of God is shown to the whole world through the person of Jesus Christ. That glory is shown to the Magi who come from far away and followed the star to Bethlehem. The wise men are the first of many people who would seek Jesus and find him.

Liturgical Colour:

Red

Symbolises royalty for this feast

THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

This feast is celebrated on the Sunday after the Epiphany

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord closes the Christmas season and prepares us to follow the teachings of Jesus and celebrate his life during the coming year. As Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan by John the Baptist the followers of John saw the heavens open and the voice of God was heard. This voice invited all those who saw Jesus to listen to his message. In this event God's glory was revealed and so the Baptism of the Lord is another 'epiphany' or 'showing'.

Liturgical Colour:

White or gold

Symbolises true joy and triumph

ORDINARY TIME

From the end of the Christmas season until Ash Wednesday (the beginning of Lent).

From the day after Pentecost until the first Sunday of Advent.

For a few weeks in January and February, and then all through the summer and autumn, the Church is in Ordinary Time. "Ordinary" comes from the word "ordinal" and means "counted". In other words, each of the weeks has a number (for example, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time). During Ordinary Time the Sunday gospels follow Jesus from story to story in Matthew, Mark or Luke. Each of these gospels is read for one year in the church's three-year cycle of Sunday Mass readings. Sunday after Sunday we also read through the various letters of Paul and others in the New Testament.

Liturgical Colour:

Green

Symbolises life and growth

LENT

Begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday in the evening – approximately 6 weeks.

In the Christian Year, Lent precedes and prepares for Easter. It is a penitential season and a time of spiritual growth and a time for discerning and doing good. Traditionally we give more time to prayer, fasting and almsgiving (money given to the 'poor' or good causes). This helps us to say 'Yes' to God's will and 'No' to our selfish ways in order to become better followers of Jesus. The season begins by recalling the 40 days Jesus fasted in the desert and prepared to proclaim the Good News. In the Northern Hemisphere, Lent begins in winter. But when the 40 days are over, we know that the warmth and new life of spring are surely coming.

Liturgical Colour:

Purple

Symbolises penance

HOLY WEEK

For the Church, Holy Week is the 'greatest week' during which the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus is remembered in special celebrations.

On **PASSION SUNDAY** which is sometimes called **PALM SUNDAY**

(because we bless palms and we hear the reading of the passion of Jesus), Christians celebrate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem to face his suffering and death.

THE PASCHAL or EASTER TRIDUUM

Begins on Holy Thursday in the evening and ends on Easter Sunday in the evening.

"Paschal Triduum" means "the Three Days of Passover". For the Jewish people, Passover celebrates the great event when God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom. The followers of Jesus proclaim that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has freed and saved us.

When Lent ends, we stand in the centre of the Christian year. On the night between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, we keep the Easter Vigil. We gather to light a fire and a towering candle, to listen to our most treasured scriptures, to sing psalms and other songs. Then we go to the waters and baptise those who have been preparing for new life in Christ. The newly

baptised are then anointed with fragrant oil and, at last, with these newly baptised, we celebrate the Eucharist.

We prepare for this Vigil in the washing of feet on Holy Thursday and in the veneration of the cross on Good Friday. We also prepare by fasting. The Church fasts – from food, from entertainment, from chatter, from work – so that we have time to ponder deeply the death and resurrection of the Lord, the mystery of faith that we will celebrate in our Vigil.

EASTER SEASON

Begins on Easter Sunday and ends 50 days later on Pentecost Sunday.

Easter Sunday is the beginning of the Easter Season which lasts for 50 days. The Easter season is to the year what Sunday is to the week. It is the heart of the Christian faith.

St. Paul writes that without a strong, unswerving belief in the resurrection of Christ, then, “empty too is our preaching; empty too your faith” (1 Corinthians 15:14.) We are an ‘Easter People’ and make “Alleluia” our song because we delight to praise the Lord who is raised from the dead and now shares his new life. The Paschal candle, the giant candle that is lit during this season whenever we celebrate in church, shows that Jesus lives.

Liturgical Colour:

White and gold

Symbolises triumph and joy

50 days (7 weeks) after Easter Sunday.

Pentecost is a Greek word meaning fiftieth. The Jewish ‘feast of weeks’ was held fifty days after the beginning of the grain harvest. It was a thanksgiving feast to celebrate the end of the harvest and to commemorate the day God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was important that they carry on his mission after he was gone. He promised he would give them the strength of his Spirit to do this. At Pentecost the Church celebrates the fulfilment of Jesus’ promise that the Holy Spirit will guide and help his disciples to understand all that he has taught them. It is sometimes called the ‘birthday’ of the Church.

Liturgical Colour:

Red

Symbolises royalty, fire and martyrdom

Ordinary Time:

Following Pentecost and then all through the summer and autumn, the Church is in Ordinary Time again. This time will complete the Liturgical year and end with the week beginning with the Feast of Christ the King. The following Sunday being the First Sunday of Advent and a new Church year.