



I LOVE TO LIVE » THE STORY «



**A Guide to Understanding and
Celebrating the Christian Church Year**

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The Church Year at a Glance

The Christian Church Year is living history, a cycle of ancient events brought to life each year. It is history that is as alive as the Church itself.

The Church Year is an annual cycle of festivals and seasons, developed straight out of the Word of God by Christian generations long before us.

Christians around the world and throughout history have shaped their faith and marked their lives by the events of the Church Year, making this cycle as new as each new year of celebration.

In the 21st century, parishes may wonder about the value of such a tradition for communal worship and personal life. For those who want to explore the meaning of the Church's liturgical year and its use in parish life, this book offers a brief overview plus appropriate symbols for use in the sanctuary and Christian classroom.

Why should we promote an understanding and appreciation of this ancient system?

First—looking back—the Church Year connects us with Scripture through a planned series of readings, which present its great stories and themes, especially the life and words of our Lord.

Second—looking ahead—the Church Year helps the Church, the community of believers, celebrate God's forgiveness and justice for people today, living in an unforgiving and unjust world.

Roughly speaking, the first half of the Church Year (Advent through Pentecost Day) recalls events in the life of our Lord, making them real for us in the present. The rest of the Church Year focuses on Jesus' teaching and on discipleship—the new life in Christ in which we are living and growing.

When Christians all over the world come together to celebrate the same festivals and seasons of the Church Year, they

- learn the words and acts of God that have changed history
- remember the birth, life, death and resurrection

of our Lord which give us a rebirth, new life and hope of the resurrection

- relive these saving events through which our Lord created his Church and transformed our lives

HOW THE CHURCH YEAR CAME TO BE

To early Christians it was vividly obvious that every Sunday was Easter again. Every Lord's Supper was a reliving of Christ's Easter victory over sin, death and the devil.

Christians then, as now, knew they shared his victory; their worship gatherings comforted and encouraged them.

As the centuries passed, the Church came to depend on the Gospel readings, the liturgy and a growing number of special days to teach its members. Repetition of the readings, the liturgy and the "holy days," year after year, helped believers to learn, remember and celebrate the main teachings of the faith.

During the Middle Ages the leaders of the Church unified observances that differed from place to place, so that a common Church Year calendar took shape. Today, many Christians in North America have adopted the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), so that they use the same Scripture readings and similar names for the festivals and seasons.

A Note to Teachers

Grade school and Sunday school teachers may wish to arrange a worship center in their classroom or chapel, using Church Year posters as a central focus and adding flowers, candles and signs of the season, as well as a Bible for class devotions. Creative craftspeople may be able to construct a classroom worship center with an altar or a wall shelf along with a place to display the poster and symbols appropriate for each season of the Church Year.

Note: Each chapter that follows will include two types of resources for each festival day or season of the Church Year:

- 1] **Images and Words** will include definitions and explanation of what Christians may see and hear in celebrating a particular part of the Church Year. These will include foreign words, phrases from Scripture, liturgical colors and season-specific objects.
- 2] **Displays and Activities** will offer suggested symbols and hands-on activities for parish and school.

Creative Communications Sample Pages

The Church Year Cycle

The Church Year is a cycle of festivals and seasons. Churches around the world and throughout history have shaped their faith and marked their lives by these events.

The first half of the Church Year (Advent through Pentecost Day) recalls events in the life of our Lord, making them real for us in the present.

The rest of the Church Year (Pentecost Season) focuses on discipleship—the new life in Christ in which we are living and growing.

The community of believers, the Church, keeps observing the Church Year because it celebrates God’s redemption.

When Christians observe the Church Year’s festivals and seasons, they

- learn the words and acts of God that have changed history
- remember the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord for us
- participate in these saving events through which our Lord creates his Church and transforms our lives

The Church Year revolves around three great festival days—Christmas, Easter and Pentecost—and the seasons that connect them—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Pentecost or Ordinary Time.



ADVENT SEASON

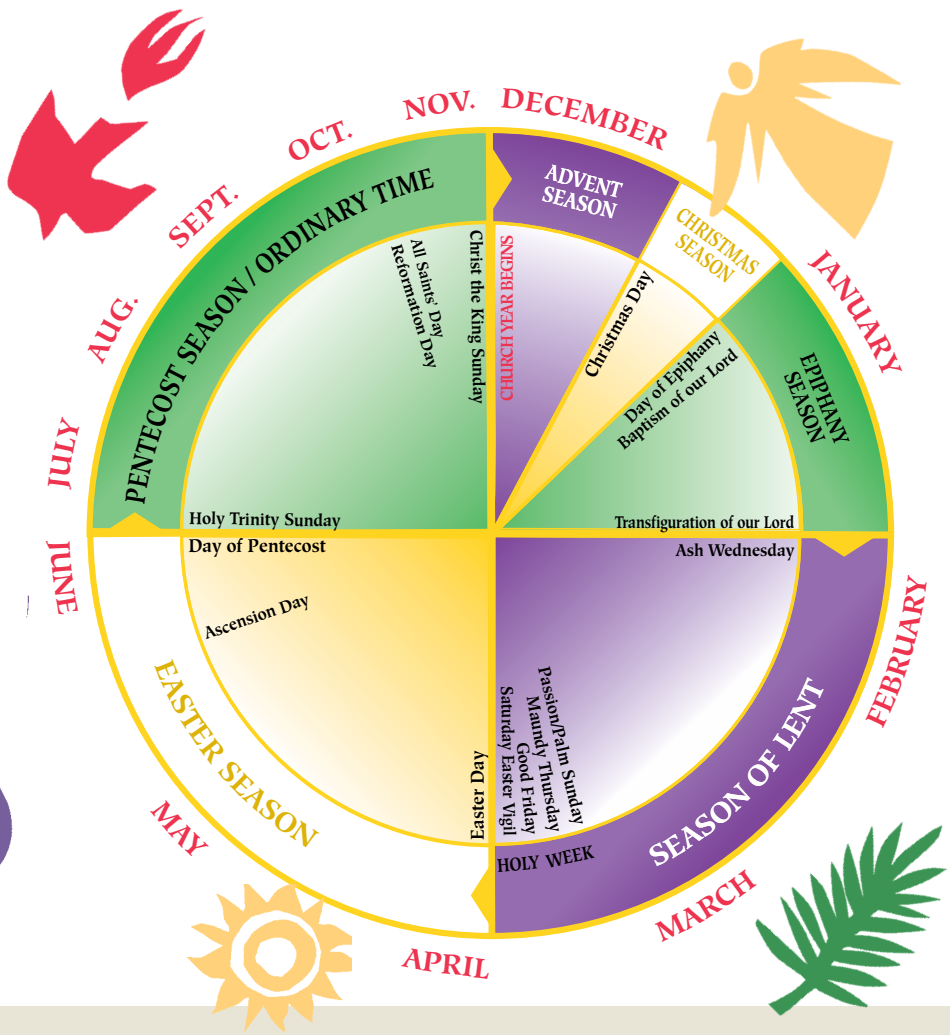
4 weeks of preparation for Christ’s coming.

CHRISTMAS SEASON

12 days of celebration of Christ’s birth, leading to Epiphany, “the Christmas of the Gentiles.”

EPIPHANY SEASON

4 to 9 weeks of thanks for Christ’s revelation to the world, including the Baptism of our Lord.



LENTEN SEASON

Ash Wednesday followed by 40 days of preparation, plus Sundays, concluding during Holy Week.

HOLY WEEK

Palm or Passion Sunday followed by the Easter Triduum (the three days beginning with the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday and ending on Easter Sunday).

EASTER SEASON


Easter Day followed by 50 days of rejoicing, including Ascension Day, leading to the season's climax, Pentecost Day.


PENTECOST SEASON


2 dozen weeks from Holy Trinity Sunday to Christ the King Sunday. The festival of All Saints is celebrated late in the season.


Colors of the Church Year


The Church's liturgical "color scheme" began in the earliest centuries simply with white and, later, red for all occasions. Apparently it was during the Middle Ages that a set of specific meanings came to be attached to certain colors for Church usage. These meanings undoubtedly came out of ancient culture and, while not specifically Christian, were adopted in the 16th century for use throughout the Church.


 **GREEN:** life. Green appears during the Pentecost and Epiphany seasons. Think fresh sprouts, green leaves!


 **WHITE:** purity, holiness. White appears on Christmas and its season and Epiphany Day, Easter and its season, Trinity Sunday, festivals of Christ, some days of the apostles and non-martyrs, days involving Mary, angels and saints. Think snowflakes and sunlight and supernovas!


 **RED:** blood, fire, the Holy Spirit. Red appears on Pentecost, some apostles' days, martyrs' dates, and Holy Cross Day. Think flames and sacrifice.

 **VIOLET:** royalty, repentance. Violet appears through Lent and, in some parishes, during Advent. Think kingly robes. (We seem to have lost any modern connection between violet and penitence.)

 **BLUE:** hope. Blue has become the color for Advent in many denominations. Think fall skies and deep oceans.

 **BLACK:** death, mourning. Used only on Ash Wednesday and/or Good Friday.

 **GOLD:** Used as a substitute for any of the other colors (today especially for white on Easter and other "high" festival days). Think jewelry, precious coins and the sun.

 **ROSE:** joy. Rose is used in some denominations just for the third Sunday of Advent and the fourth Sunday in Lent, both of which are days of joy in otherwise more serious seasons. Think roses and bouquets.

By learning about liturgical colors and their meanings, all of us can appreciate and understand the Church Year.

Creative Communications
Sample Pages

The Season of **Advent**



The word *advent*, which means “coming,” is a good word with which to begin the Church Year, when we are tempted to ask, “What’s coming?” A more correct question would be “Who’s coming?”

The answer is “Jesus!”

The entire Old Testament points to Jesus as the one who was coming, when God’s time was right. For many centuries, prophets had foretold the coming of God’s Messiah, the one whom God had promised to save God’s people from their sins and teach us God’s will. Some of the Scripture readings in our Advent season quote those ancient promises.

As the four weeks of Advent move ahead, the coming gets more specific. We learn who Jesus’ mother will be, for example, and how God’s angel told her so. We learn about other members of the family as well, the family of John the Baptizer.



All of this happened in history, of course, about 2000 years ago. Another message of the Advent season is that the One who has come is coming again. How does the Creed put it? “To judge the living and the dead.” How did Jesus himself put it? “To take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). So the Advent season actually deals with two comings of Christ, one when Jesus was born hundreds of years ago, and one when he comes again in the future to reveal himself as our Savior.

But there is a third coming of Christ, the Advent season announces. That is when Jesus comes into our hearts and lives right now by his Word so that we may believe in him. All three of these comings show up in the Church’s Advent readings, almost stumbling over one another to make sure we get the point.

Many people and churches use an Advent wreath to mark the four weeks of the season, lighting one candle on the first Sunday of the season, two candles on the second, three on the third, and four on the last Sunday in Advent. As Christmas gets closer, the light gets brighter, and the Church prays, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus”—for Advent means “coming.”

Images and Words

Advent: a Latin word meaning a “coming” or “arrival.”

Stir Up: These words begin the Collect (prayer) each Sunday during Advent. “Stir up your power, O Lord, and come!”

Prepare the Way: This is the message of the Old Testament prophets who called God’s people to repentance and of John the Baptizer who announced Jesus’ arrival. We hear this message in the Scripture readings during Advent.

Candles celebrate the Light of the World, God’s Son, who overcomes the darkness and the long winter of our souls (see Advent wreaths).

A crown symbolizes the King of Glory, Jesus Christ, who left his position in glory to enter our world humbly and who will come again in glory to judge the world.

Emmanuel (or Immanuel) is Hebrew for “God with us.” Isaiah the prophet promised that the Lord would come to be with his people. As a sign of this promise, the baby in Isaiah 7:14 was called “God with us.”

Messiah is the Hebrew word meaning “anointed one,” that is, the “chosen one.” The Greek name “Christ” means the same.

Son of David is the title of a descendant of the great Old Testament King David. From David’s family and town the Lord God raised up the Messiah, Jesus.

Maranatha! is Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke) for “Our Lord, come!” The earliest Christians shouted this word in their worship. They were ready to welcome Jesus on his return as Lord of the universe. In our Sunday Advent prayers (called “collects”) we cry, “Stir up your power, O Lord, and come!”

The Angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah (and Elizabeth) and to Mary and Joseph that each couple would experience the miraculous birth of a child—one born to elderly parents, the other born of the Spirit of the Lord. John would become the prophet and forerunner. Jesus would be God-with-us, who would save God’s people from their sin. (Luke 1:8-38)

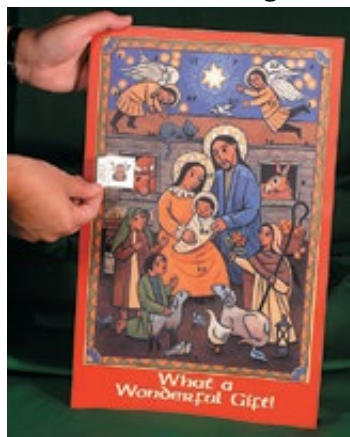
Advent colors. Purple is the ancient color of royalty (as well as penitence), signaling the coming of our King. The more recent use of blue symbolizes the hope of God’s people who trust in their unfailing Lord and King.

Advent Displays and Activities

Advent wreaths. Four candles (traditionally three purple or blue and one pink) are placed around a circular wreath plus one central white candle (representing our hope in the Light of the World, whom the powers of darkness cannot overcome). Lighting a new (outer) candle each week marks our Advent journey to the Christ Child.

Antiphons. The Great O Antiphons are ancient verses that are usually spoken or sung during the week before Christmas. These verses name Jesus with great titles only he deserves: O Wisdom, O Sacred Lord, O Flower of Jesse’s Stem, O Key of David, O Radiant Dawn, O King of All Nations, and O Emmanuel. You may use each of these seven antiphons—one each day from December 17 through 23—by singing the stanzas of the hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

Advent calendars count the days of Advent in December until Christmas. Opening the windows of an Advent calendar daily reminds young and old where our eternal hope lies—with the holy Child in a lowly manger.



Advent Jesse tree is another way of counting the days until Christmas. Named after King David’s father, the tree is decorated day by day with ornaments displaying Old Testament heroes and happenings. This pre-Christmas Tree reminds us that our faith’s roots are in God’s Old Covenant promises to the ancient Jews.

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The Christian Church Year is a convenient, colorful tool for leading Christian communities to understand and celebrate the story of our Lord and the Church, as well as our own stories!

This booklet summarizes the essentials which any leader, teacher or inquiring parishioner needs to know about the Church Year—the message of its seasons and days, as well as basic details to aid in celebrating them.

This book, along with many other
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is available on [amazon](#)kindle and [nook](#)

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