

Church Festivals and Events

The church year was not appointed or laid out in the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament only makes reference to the observance of the first day of the week, the day on which Christ Jesus rose from the dead (*Acts 20:7*). Very soon, however, came the annual observance of Good Friday and Easter, next came Pentecost. By the fourth century Christmas was celebrated, and by the sixth century Advent was added. Later on other events in the life of Christ and in the life of the church were added to the calendar. By the end of the first millennium, the outline of the church year as we have it today was in place.

The basic unit of time within the church is the day. As noted above, the first day of the week was observed as the Lord's Day because it was on this day that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. Each Sunday, therefore, is a celebration of the resurrection. The liturgical day, however, does not begin at midnight or at sunrise. It begins at sunset on the evening before. This follows Old Testament practice, which derives from the structure of the day, which God established at creation: "**And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day**" (*Genesis 1:5*).

The next unit of liturgical time is the week. Each day of the week receives its theme from and is sanctified by the celebration of the resurrection on the previous Sunday. In Christian tradition, however, each day of the week also had a special emphasis. Friday, for example, was a day of fasting in remembrance of Good Friday, the day of our Lord's crucifixion. Lutheran Worship continues this tradition by suggesting a weekly rhythm for prayer emphases.

The third unit of liturgical time is the year. Over the course of this year the major events in the life of Christ are observed and the primary teachings for the life of his church are reviewed. These two emphases correspond to the division of the church year into two parts: the festival half and the non-festival half. A different way of looking at the church year is to divide it into three times: **The Time of Christmas**, **The Time of Easter** and **The Time of the Church**. Each of these times, in turn, contains one or more seasons.

The, First Division of the Church Year is: The Time of Christmas which is split into three parts.

- Advent- (November - December);
- Christmas - (December - January);
- Epiphany (January-March)

Advent begins the Church Year (*four Sundays, beginning with the Sunday closest to November 30th - St. Andrew's Day*). Advent is from a Latin word meaning "*coming*," and its emphasis is on preparation for the coming of Christ. The first part of Advent focuses on the coming of Christ as King and Judge, while the latter part looks to his coming in the incarnation. The mood of Advent, therefore, is one of hope, anticipation, and preparedness. In the traditional One-Year Lectionary the Third Sunday in Advent was called Gaudete, which means "*rejoice*." Its theme was the anticipation of the joy coming into the world at the nativity.

The color for Advent is **blue** - the color of spiritual love, fidelity, anticipation, and hope - and reminds us of the coming birth of our King, Jesus.

The season of Christmas begins on the evening of December 24, the Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord, and continues through January 5. The feast day is December 25. On the octave of Christmas two festivals occur: the Circumcision of Our Lord and the Name of Jesus. Depending on the day of the week on which Christmas falls, there may be two Sundays after Christmas. In most years, however, there is only one. Because of the nature of this singular event in the history of the world and its meaning for our salvation, the festival and season of Christmas is a time of great joy.

The color for Nativity is **White** - the color of purity and eternity, symbolizing perfection, celebration, and joy.

You can also read more about Christmas as it relates to our culture outside of the church traditions.

The third part of the Time of Christmas is the season of. The Epiphany of Our Lord falls on January 6 and commemorates the visit of the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Like Christmas, this season begins on the eve of the feast, that is, the evening of January 5. On the Sunday after the Epiphany the church observes the Baptism of Our Lord.

Depending on the date of Ash Wednesday, there may be as many as eight Sundays after the Epiphany. The last Sunday after the Epiphany is the Transfiguration of Our Lord. The emphasis of the Epiphany season is on the self-revelation of God to the world. Beginning with the Epiphany, when Christ revealed himself to the Gentile Wise Men as a "*Light to lighten the Gentiles*," this revelation emphasis continues, as the Gospel readings depict how Jesus revealed himself in word and deed.

The color for Epiphany is **green** - the color of life, refreshment, and regeneration.

The, Second Division of the Church Year is: The Time of Easter which is split into three parts.

- Lent (March-April)
- Eastertide (April-June)
- Pentecost (June-November)

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, whose precise date depends on the date of Easter (*see below*). The name "Ash Wednesday" comes from a practice originating in the Middle Ages of ashes being sprinkled over the heads of those who came to church and went to confession. Today ashes are applied to the forehead in the shape of a cross. Ordinarily, the ashes come from palms that were blessed on Palm Sunday the year before. Both this rite and the traditional readings for the day call for an attitude of humility and repentance.

Technically Lent consists of 40 days of fasting. This excludes the Sundays in between which are not Sundays of Lent but Sundays in Lent. There are five Sundays in Lent. The Fourth Sunday in Lent, according to the traditional One-Year Lectionary, is called Laetare, which means "*rejoice*." This Sunday was apparently introduced to relieve some of the rigors of observing the Lenten fast, but like Gaudete in Advent it can be considered anticipatory of the joy of Easter. The season of Lent continues until the eve of Palm Sunday. In the Middle Ages the penitential aspect of Lent was emphasized and the observance of the season was often rigorous and austere. With the revised lectionary included in Lutheran Worship the repentance theme is balanced more with reflection and renewal in faith and life.

The color for Lent is **purple** - the color for royalty, but also of sorrow and repentance.

The second part of the Time of Easter is Holy Week. **Holy Week** begins with Palm Sunday (*also called the Sunday of the Passion*), which recalls Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The three following days, Monday of Holy Week, Tuesday of Holy Week, and Wednesday of Holy Week, look at the events that led up to the crucifixion. Maundy Thursday (*also called Holy Thursday*) commemorates the institution of the Lord's Supper as a "*memorial*" of Christ's Passion. On Good Friday (*also called Holy Friday*) we recall the climactic event in the life of our Lord on earth, the crucifixion. During Holy Week the focus is on the suffering and death of our Savior and the importance that it has for us and for our salvation.

The color for Holy Week is **Scarlet** - the color of royalty and passion.

The third and final part of the Time of Easter is the season of Easter. **Easter** is the high point of the church year and has been called the "*queen of feasts*." The early church recognized the importance of this feast, since it was the first festival to be observed annually by Christians. Easter is the time of greatest joy, because, by the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus proved that he is the victor over sin, death, and the grave.

The date of Easter changes from year to year. This fluctuation is because the date of Easter was originally set according to a lunar (*moon*) calendar. The moon is still used to set the date of Easter. The formula is as follows: Easter is the Sunday after the first full

moon following the spring equinox. The spring equinox falls on March 21. This means that the earliest date Easter can be is March 22, while the latest is April 25.

The color of Easter is **White** - the color of purity and eternity, symbolizing perfection, celebration, and joy.

Easter begins with the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. Like Christmas and Epiphany, the festival commences already on the Eve of Easter. Easter is followed by six Sundays. The first Sunday following is designated the Second Sunday of Easter and the last is called the Seventh Sunday of Easter. Between the Sixth and Seventh Sundays of Easter is **Ascension Day**. Ascension Day falls on the 40th day after Easter and commemorates when the risen Lord ascended into heaven. It is always on a Thursday. The conclusion of the Easter season is the **Feast of Pentecost**, the 50th day after Easter. On Pentecost we commemorate the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, to the disciples who were waiting in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus. Because it is through the work of the Spirit that we receive the benefits of Christ's work for us, Pentecost is also a time of great celebration and joy.

The color of Pentecost is **Red** - The color of zeal (*fire*) and martyrdom (*blood*).

The Third Division of the Church Year is: The Time of the Church.

- The Time after Pentecost (June-November)
- Reformation Day (October 31)
- All Saints Sunday

The third division of the church year, which actually covers about half of the calendar year, is the Time of the Church. The Time of the Church begins with the Sunday of the Holy Trinity, also known as the First Sunday after Pentecost. The following Sundays, until the end of the church year, are then enumerated as Sundays after Pentecost. They were formerly designated Sundays after Trinity, but the usage "*after Pentecost*" was earlier. To call them Sundays after Pentecost, therefore, is simply a return to an earlier custom. If Pentecost falls early enough, there may be as many as 28 Sundays after Pentecost. The last Sunday after Pentecost is called the Sunday of the Fulfillment or Christ the King Sunday.

The color for the time after Pentecost is **green** - the color of life, refreshment, and regeneration.

Reformation Day is the celebration of when Martin Luther's study of the Holy Scriptures brought a new conviction, that salvation is not "earned" by works -- it is a Divine Gift of God. It is through faith that man receives God's divine gift of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then his sins are forgiven by the sheer mercy of God. This Doctrine of Justification by Faith soon came to form the basis of Luther's religious thoughts. It was because of this that Luther began to question the Church's practice of Indulgence. According to the church, some people were better than needed in order to be saved. Their "extra merit" could be transferred via an indulgence to those whose salvation was in doubt. This was done by making a pilgrimage and paying a small sum. By Luther's time the idea was being abused and indulgences were on public sale. As a parish priest of Wittenberg, Luther protested this situation to the Archbishop of Mainz.

These things led to Luther writing his 95 Thesis and nailing them to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. There were three basic ideas: protest against the abuse of papal authority; challenge to the Pope; and denial of the "extra merit" theory behind indulgences.

All Saints Sunday is celebrated the first Sunday in November, during the season of Pentecost.

Martin Luther writes, *"the Holy Scriptures call Christians saints and the people of God. To forget that we are saints is to forget Christ and to forget our baptism."*

All Saints is a day for remembering and giving thanks, as Christians remember the good people they have known and give thanks for the unending goodness of God.

NIV Isaiah 43:1 But now, this is what the LORD says - he who created you... he who formed you... *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."* Also our God calls us today to recommit ourselves to His work in His kingdom. To take the many gifts He has given to us. To rededicate our Time, Talents and Treasures to the task of proclaiming the life saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. Yet there is more, so much more, as we are brought to the Lord's Supper to commune with our Lord and Savior. We remember those Saints who have gone on before us. Our loved ones who are awaiting our arrival. God's love through His Son, our Savior, is awesome to behold!

Other Church Events

- The Rite of Confirmation (May)

[Confirmation](#) is a rite in which a person instructed in the Christian faith, trusting in the promise given in Holy Baptism, publicly confesses the doctrine that he or she has been taught and publicly pledges to remain faithful in the use of God's word and the Sacraments.

Most of the above information is based in part on
"The Altar Guild Manual" by Lee A. Maxwell
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