

The Church's Year

Judaism and Christianity both divide the week and year into festivals and seasons. Very early on Christians gathered on Sundays; separating themselves from the Jewish Sabbath and celebrating the Resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week.

The Church also began to use the year to remember and tell the Christian story. This enables the past to inform the present. Through the year we relive the old, old story now, in our own lives. By celebrating different aspects of Jesus life and the stages of the biblical story we can take time to explore the different characteristics of God. In more sacramental churches colour helps identify the theme of the season.

Advent begins the year - 4 Sundays of expectation and preparation

This recalls Israel's initial wait for the coming of the messiah, and our own wait for the second coming and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

- Colour: Purple for a preparation season, part penitential, part expectation. (Some wear blue from the old Sarum Rite). Some have pink on the 3rd Sunday (Gaudete).
- Symbols: Advent Wreath, advent candle, advent calendar, empty manger.
- Service material: Advent Carols, Service of Light, Christmas Carols, O Antiphons, Christingle, Nativity Plays.
- Principal Service focus is now on those who prepared the world for Christ's coming: Patriarchs, prophets, John the Baptist and Mary (some churches focus more on the second coming, judgement and justice).

Christmas season begins with Midnight Mass and lasts until Epiphany (6th January)

Marking the birth of Christ (incarnation) it is one of the most significant feasts, recalling John 1:14: 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'.

- Colour: Gold or White.
- Symbols: Nativity cribs and nativity characters, Christmas candle, angels.
- Service material: Christmas carols, Christmas service.
- Principal Service focus: John 1; Matthew/ Luke's birth stories; martyrdom of Stephen (26th Dec); Holy Innocents (28th Dec); Jesus naming and circumcision (1st Jan).

Epiphany begins on 6th January and runs to Candlemas 2nd February

This season marks the revelation of God in Christ and significant moments, in the Gospels, where Jesus is recognised. We are encouraged to recognise Christ too.

- Colour: White.
- Symbols: candles, magi.
- Service material: Candlemas service.
- Principal Service focus: John 1, recognition by the Magi, John the Baptist at Jesus' baptism, Mary at the wedding of Cana and recognition by Simeon and Anna.

Ordinary Time: 2nd February until Ash Wednesday

Ordinary time, here, provides a brief interlude on Jesus' life before we prepare for his death and resurrection. Its length varies depending on the date of Easter.

- Colour: Green.
- No special symbols or services.
- Principal Service focus: Jesus teachings. The season ends with the Transfiguration.

Lent: Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday

Ash Wednesday starts the penitential season of preparation for Easter with themes of self-denial, repentance and cleansing. Lent is traditionally 40 days (excluding Sundays which are always feast days) reflecting Jesus time in the wilderness (Lk 4:1-13).

- Colour: Purple (or Lent array if the church has a separate Lent set).
- Symbols: ash, desert, wilderness, crosses.
- Service material: Ash Wednesday service, Lent 4: Mothering Sunday (flowers, Simnel cake); Lent study groups.
- Principal Service focus: Jesus temptation starts the season. Then predictions and anticipations of Jesus death mix with stories revealing his purpose. The fourth Sunday may be celebrated as Mothering Sunday. Passiontide begins the 5th Sunday.

Holy Week: Passion/Palm Sunday - Holy Saturday

The last week of Lent takes a particular intensity as we relive the last days in Jerusalem.

- Colour: Red.
- Symbols: cross, palms and at the end of the week removal or covering of symbols.
- Service material: Special services for most days.
- Principal Service focus: Palm Sunday has the entry into Jerusalem but also a reading of the whole passion account which often replaces a sermon. Select stories from Jesus last days follow. Maundy Thursday starts the Paschal Triduum with the Last Supper and Gethsemane vigil. Good Friday has the crucifixion and Holy Saturday the burial. The Easter Vigil gathers in the dark to commemorate God's great salvific activities in Israel's story. The Easter Vigil gives way to the service of light, the kindling of the new fire, renewal of baptismal vows and the Light of Christ.

Eastertide - Easter Day until Pentecost

Easter is the second great festival of the church's year and it celebrates the joy of resurrection, new life and new hope. Baptisms and confirmation often happen at Easter and all people may renew their baptismal vows. It is 50 days in length.

- Colour: Gold or white.
- Symbols: Paschal candle, Easter garden (and bonnets).
- Service material: Easter Liturgy; Baptisms and Confirmations.
- Principal Service focus: Stories of Jesus resurrection and readings from the Book of Acts. The last 2 days before Ascension are Rogation days to pray for the harvest.

Ascensiontide - Ascension to Pentecost (9 days)

This final 9 days of Easter turns from the joy of Jesus' resurrection to the bewilderment of his leaving again and preparation for the coming of the Spirit to be with us.

- Colour: White.
- Symbols: clouds, absence.
- Service material: Ascension Day Service on Thursday. Thy Kingdom Come Prayer
- Principal Service focus: Ascension celebrates Christ leaving the disciples and sending them out for mission. 9 days of prayer and preparation for the coming of the Spirit follow with readings from John on the Spirit.

Pentecost (Whit Sunday) - Pentecost to Trinity Sunday (1 week)

The feast of Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Spirit empowering the disciples for mission and the birth of the church, the new body of Christ on earthy.

- Colour: Red.
- Symbols: Fire, wind, spirit, dove.
- Service material: Pentecost Service.
- Principal Service focus: Acts 2.

Ordinary Time: Trinity Sunday to Advent

Having spent half the year celebrating Jesus life, ordinary time focuses on our lives, lived as the Body of Christ on earth.

- Colour: Green.
- Symbols: No special symbols, choose those appropriate to the Sunday theme.
- Service material: Various thematic services available.
- Principal Service focus: There are 2 strands of readings, a thematic strand to look at themes of the Christian life or continuous readings to explore a whole book of the Bible. The time is punctuated by various themes:

Trinity Sunday - first after Pentecost celebrates the Trinity

Corpus Christi - Thursday after Trinity Sunday - thanksgiving for Holy Communion

Bible Sunday - Sunday before All Saints - thanksgiving for the Bible

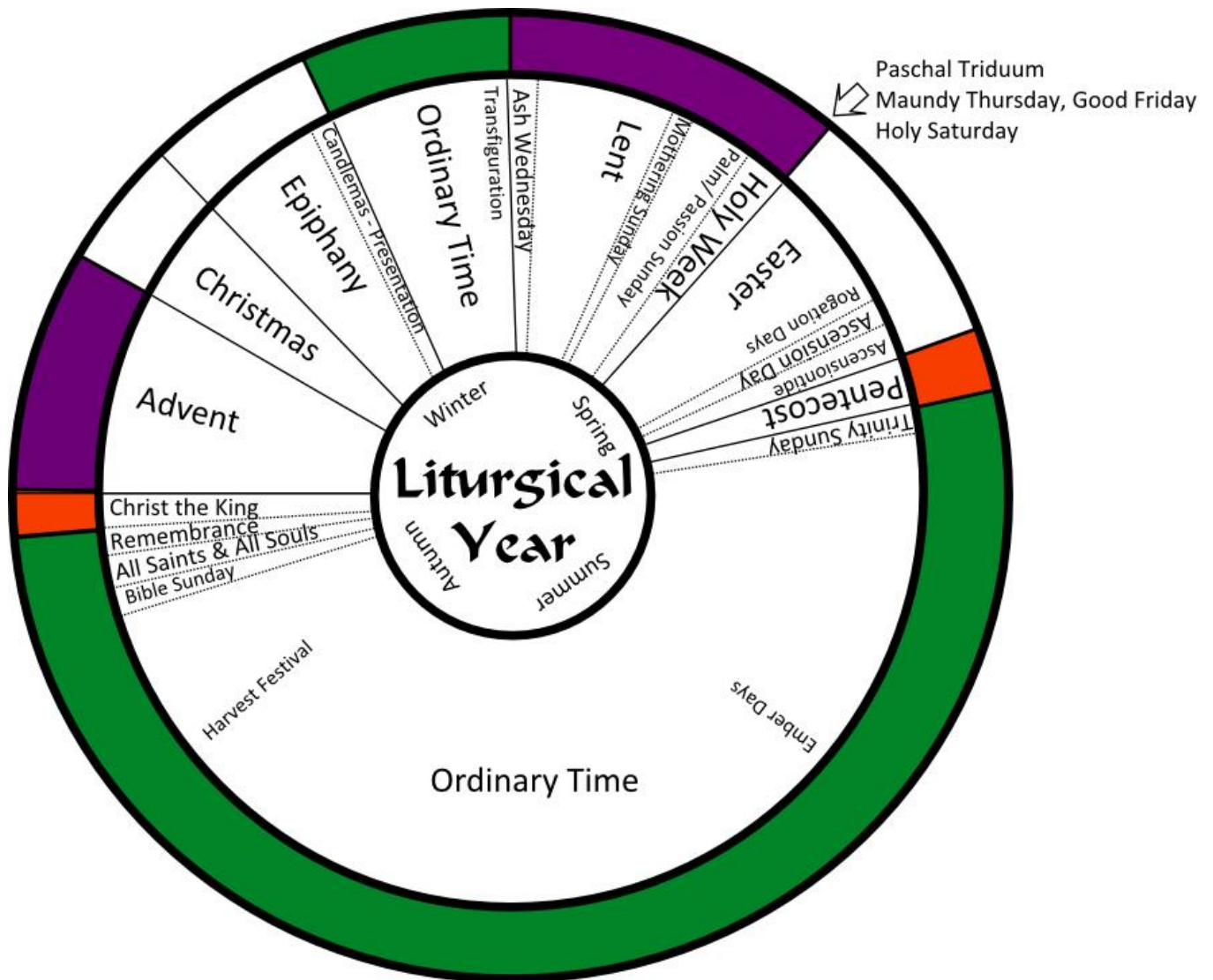
Petertide (29th June St Peter and St Paul) and Michaelmas (29th September St Michael and All Angels) are the main ordination weekends preceded by Ember days praying for vocations.

There are many other celebrations according to local custom in this period e.g. Harvest festivals in September or October; Church dedications - on the saint's day or the first Sunday of October; Creationtide - Sundays in September.

Kingdomtide - All Saints - Advent

More recently the last month has become a time to celebrate and reflect on the reign of Christ in heaven and on earth. The first part of this period is a time of remembrance (All Saints, All Souls, Remembrance Day ending with Christ the King Sunday).

- Colour: Red or Green
- Symbols: saints, poppies,
- Service material: Special services for each of the days.
- Principal Service focus: Remembrance; predictions of Jesus return as King



Resources

The Church Calendar and Lectionary are available from Church House Publishing and online:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/liturgical-year>
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/churchs-year/lectionary>