

## LITURGICAL CALENDAR

Just as a typical calendar has four seasons, twelve months, fifty-two weeks, and 365 days that include holidays, solemn days, commemorative days, and days that are just "average," the Liturgical Year Calendar uses similar terms and measurements. The Liturgical Year begins on the first Sunday of Advent, which usually occurs around the beginning of December or the end of November, and ends on the feast of Christ the King.

However, the purpose of the Liturgical Year Calendar is not to mark the passage of time, but to celebrate and understand more fully the entire mystery of Jesus Christ, from his incarnation and birth until his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of his return in glory. The calendar is divided in four parts:

1. **Advent to Christmas through Epiphany**
2. **Time after Epiphany**
3. **Lent to Easter through Pentecost**
4. **Kingdomtide** (Time after Pentecost)

### Advent to Christmas through Epiphany

**Advent** means "coming", anticipating the Coming of the Lord. Advent is the first season of the liturgical year. It is traditionally a fast, and begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Its purpose is the preparation for Christmas, with the focus on expectation. Awaiting the coming of the Christ Child into the world is often represented by the Advent Wreath, a garland of evergreens with 4 candles: 3 purple and one rose. Each candle lit represents a particular theme of the coming Christmas season for which one is preparing, hope, faith, love and joy.

At **Christmas** we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus. For Christians the principal purpose of the Christmas cycle is to remind us of the radical transformation effected in our human life. By coming into this world to take upon Himself our human nature, Gods own Son did not merely become one of us; He gave us the power of becoming real children of God. A new race, a holy people, whom He, with his Divine Life, leads to the heavenly throne.

Christmas began in Rome as a response to pagan festivals centering around the Winter Solstice, which at that time was December 25th. The pagan celebration established by the Roman Emperor Aurelian in 274 AD was called "The Birth of the Invincible Sun" or "The Mystic Midnight Sun." In 335 AD, Roman Christians began to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus Christ on December 25th to assert their Christian faith during the pagan feast, with January 1st as the day of Holy Name which commemorates Jesus' circumcision, when he was give his name.

Generally misunderstood as being the days before Christmas, the Twelve Days of Christmas start after Christmas Day and end at Epiphany. The eighth day, January 1st, is the day Jesus would have been circumcised and given his name according to Jewish tradition. *Luke 2:21*.

Epiphany is is celebrated twelve days after Christmas on January 6 (also known as Twelfth Day), or the first Sunday of the new year, which commemorates the visitation by the Magi to Jesus and His mother Mary ([Matthew 2:1-12](#)). We celebrate their journey and the significance of their offerings of gold (recognizing Jesus' role as King), frankincense (recognizing Jesus' role as priest, intervening for us with God), and myrrh (foreseeing Jesus' death for our sins). The celebration of Epiphany actually predates that of Christmas.

## Time After Epiphany

Sometimes called Ordinary Time, the word ordinary refers to ordinal, meaning counted time. It is not meant to imply common or mundane time. It is a time of transition from the joy of Christmas to the sorrow of Lent. The time after Epiphany is when we reflect on the events of the life of Jesus and how these events have significance today, both as a church and within our individual lives. The length of this season varies each year from four to nine Sundays, depending on how early or late Easter falls in a given year. The first Sunday after the Epiphany is the **Baptism of the Lord** and the last Sunday before the beginning of Lent is the **Transfiguration of the Lord**.

## Lent to Easter through Pentecost

**Lent** is the period of forty days, excluding Sundays, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, observed annually as a season of fasting, penitence and self-denial. Lent was fixed at forty days in the 8th century, the number forty having religious significance in the Bible. It is the period of prayer and self-denial in preparation of Easter. The term "Lent" comes from the old Anglo Saxon word "lenctern", which meant spring.

**Ash Wednesday** is the beginning of Lent, where the ashes of the palm fronds from Palm Sunday of the previous year are smeared on the foreheads of penitents symbolizing contrition and repentance.

**Palm Sunday** is also known as Passion Sunday, meaning sorrows. Originally in the Catholic Church the fifth Sunday of Lent was Passion Sunday. In 1970 Passion Sunday was changed to the sixth Sunday of Lent, the same as Palm Sunday, and caused considerable confusion. The entire week before Easter was re-designated and Holy Week became the Week of Passion.

Beginning Holy Week on Palm Sunday palm fronds are blessed outside the church building and a procession enters, singing, re-enacting the entry into Jerusalem. These palms are saved in many churches to be burned later as the source of ashes used in Ash Wednesday services.

During Holy Week, the last week of Lent, we are filled with sorrow with each day having significance.

**Holy Monday** commemorates Jesus' cleansing of the temple, when he assaulted money changers and overturned their tables; *Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:12, Luke 19:45*.

**Holy Tuesday** recalls Jesus' description to his disciples on the Mount of Olives of the destruction of Jerusalem. *Signs of the End of the Age; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21*.

**Holy Wednesday** once called Spy Wednesday, recalls Judas' decision to betray Jesus in exchange for 30 pieces of silver. *Matthew 26:14; Luke 22:1-6*.

**Maunder Thursday** commemorates the last Passover Feast of Jesus known as the Last Supper. *Matthew 26: 17-30, Mark 14: 12-20, Luke 22: 17-38, John: 13: 1-17* "Maunder" is derived from the Latin "mandatum" a commandment of God. In addition to the commandment "Do this in remembrance of me" there are two others within this time period; *John 13:3-7* where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and commands them to do the same. And in *John 13:34-35* a new commandment of Love is given.

The Triduum or Three Days (Triduum is a Latin word that refers to the three days from sundown Holy Thursday (Maunder Thursday) to sundown Easter Day)

**Good Friday** recalls Jesus' death on the cross with the crucifixion representing the giving up of the individual personality and learning to live daily by the spiritual laws.

**Holy Saturday** or Easter Eve is the final day of Holy Week and of Lent. It is the dark night of the soul, a time of soul searching, of accepting and assimilating all we have learned since Ash Wednesday.

**Easter** Sunday, the day of Resurrection Easter Sunday falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 20th the nominal date of the Spring Equinox and can fall on any date from March 22nd to April 25th a year-to-year sequence that is so complicated it takes 5.7 million years to repeat.

Early Christians observed Pascha, Christian Passover, in the Spring of the year. Adapted from Jewish Passover, Pascha was a festival of redemption and commemorated both the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the vehicle for God's grace. While historical records are not clear, it is likely that early Jewish Christians observed both Passover (Pesach) and Pascha. However, many Gentile converts were hesitant to adopt the Jewish festival, especially since the Jerusalem Council had decided that Gentile converts to Christianity did not have to observe Jewish religious practices, *Acts 15*. By the fourth century Easter moved into a distinctively Christian celebration of the Resurrection, with Good Friday commemorating Jesus' crucifixion and death. In the early church, converts were baptized into church membership on this day after a lengthy period of instruction. This tradition continues today in some churches.

Following Easter Sunday until Pentecost, Jesus visits the disciples many times. Three are mentioned specifically and celebrated in many churches.

**First Visitation** to the Apostles: *John 20:19-25* The day following Easter, known as Easter Monday, commemorates the first visitation of Jesus to the apostles which was unexpected and after which, Thomas not being present, avowed his skepticism.

**Second Visitation** to the Apostles: *John 20:26-31*. The first Sunday after Easter is called Low Sunday because of the final removal of the white robes that are used by the persons being prepared for Baptism at Easter. This is the second visitation and the first planned visit to the disciples by Jesus, where Thomas was present and believed.

**Third Visitation** to the Apostles: *John 21:1-19* The third visitation at the Sea of Tiberias Jesus charges the Apostles with their ministry.

**Ascension Day** marks the bodily ascent of Christ into heaven and is commemorated the fortieth day after Easter, also called Holy Thursday. The church has accepted the account in *Acts 1:1-11* and *Luke 24:50-53* and although tradition states that it was first celebrated in the year 68 AD it did not become formally recognized by the church until the late 3rd century.

The Easter Season ends at **Pentecost**, a celebration occurring seven weeks or 49 days after Easter Sunday. It recalls the visitation of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and the disciples in *Acts 2:1-41*. The day was originally a Jewish festival which was called "Pentecost" because it was observed 50 days after Passover. The Greek word for the 50th day is pentecoste. This is usually regarded as the date of the birth of the Christian church and the time of the Great Baptism. The celebration was mentioned in a 2nd century book and was formally recognized in the 3rd century. Also called Whitsunday or White Sunday, so called from the white robes worn by recently baptized persons on that day.

## Time after Pentecost

Also known as Kingdomtide, this time between Pentecost and Advent is less structured by tradition and can be a time when churches and individuals can be creative; a time for a greater understanding of the message of Jesus.

The first Sunday after Pentecost is **Trinity Sunday**, a celebration of the Triune nature of God, as Father or Creator, Son or Redeemer, and Holy Spirit.

**All Saints Day** is November 1 and commemorates those of the faith who have preceded us in death. We remember in particular those who have died in the past year. Often All Saints Sunday is celebrated on the Sunday following All Saints Day.

The last Sunday before Advent is **Christ the King Sunday**.

## LITURGICAL COLORS

The **Liturgical Calendar** is the calendar of the church, which sets and follows the religious seasons of the year. Each day or season of the Liturgical Year is associated with a color or colors, which may be used in the decoration of the church, and in the vestments of the celebrants. The following Liturgical Calendar shows the seasons and Holy Days recognized by The United Methodist Church.

Day/Season	Description	Color
Season of Advent	Advent marks the beginning of the church year. The first day of Advent occurs four Sundays before Christmas Day (December 25).	Purple (Traditional) Blue
Season of Christmas	Begins on Christmas Eve (December 24) and extends the 12 Days to the eve of Epiphany.	White or Gold
Epiphany of the Lord	January 6	White or Gold
Season after (of) Epiphany	Begins on the Sunday following the Epiphany of the Lord and extends until Lent. Also known as "Ordinary Time".	Green
Transfiguration of the Lord	Sunday before the beginning of Lent	White
Ash Wednesday	The first day of Lent	Purple
Lent	Begins on Ash Wednesday - 40 days, plus Sundays, prior to Easter. February or March.	Purple
Holy Week	The week immediately prior to Easter. Begins with Palm Sunday, and includes Maundy (or Holy) Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday.	Purple. Black - or no color - may be used to drape the church from Good Friday to Holy Saturday
Easter Sunday	Calculated to fall on the Sunday following the first full moon following the Vernal (Spring) Equinox. No earlier than March 22, and no later than April 25.	White or Gold
Season of Easter	The fifty days following Easter Sunday, ending on Pentecost.	White or Gold
Ascension	Forty days after Easter - observed the following Sunday (last Sunday of Easter) in The United Methodist Church.	White or Gold
Pentecost	The Sunday 50 days after Easter Sunday	Red
Trinity Sunday	The first Sunday after Pentecost	White
Season after Pentecost	The period between Pentecost and Advent. Also known as "Ordinary Time"	Green
All Saints Day	November 1 (May be celebrated the Sunday after).	White
Christ the King Sunday	Sunday before the beginning of Advent	White