

# Seasons of the Church Year

The Church is the recipient and the guardian of the **Liturgical Calendar**. Faithful observance of the seasons of the Church Year allows a variety of worship, the teaching of worth-while traditions, and meaningful celebrations of the events in the life of our Lord and in Church history. As we observe the earthly seasons (*spring, summer, autumn, winter*), so too the Church has distinct seasons, based upon the great festivals of the Church: **Christmas, Easter and Pentecost** - each with its own unique character, shaped by the appointed lessons from the Bible, the choice of music, the liturgical color, etc.

The first season of the Church Year is **Advent** (taken from the Latin word meaning “coming”). **Advent**, a penitential season, is a time of preparation for the Messiah at Christmas. The liturgical color is either blue or violet (*purple*). Many churches emphasize Advent by the use of an Advent Wreath (*a circle of four candles, covered with greens*). The Advent Season leads into the first great festival of the Church Year, **Christmas, the celebration of the Son of God becoming fully human for us**.

Following the Christmas season, and beginning on January 6, is the **Epiphany of Our Lord** (the word Epiphany is from the Latin word meaning “to make known”). This twelfth day after Christmas celebrates Christ’s “being made known” by a star to the Magi (*making known that Jesus is the Savior of all people!*). Many churches celebrate **Epiphany** with the ceremony of the Burning of the Greens (*live trees and garland*). The extension of the **Epiphany of Our Lord** is the **Epiphany Season**, celebrating the additional “*epiphanies*” of the deity of Him who was born of the Virgin Mary (*i.e., the Baptism of our Lord, the Wedding at Cana, the calling of the Apostles, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Transfiguration*). The seasonal colors are white (**The Epiphany of Our Lord and the Baptism of Our Lord**), while the rest of the Sundays of the Epiphany Season use green.

About 70 days before Easter, the Church enters the preparation for the **Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter)**, through the observance of the **Holy Season of Lent**, which begins on **Ash Wednesday**. The term “**Ash Wednesday**” comes from the ceremony in which ashes are applied to the forehead of people with the words: “**Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**” **Ash Wednesday** remains the most penitential day of the Church Year. **Lent** itself the most **penitential** season, emphasizing our debt of sin which God paid by the sacrifice of His Son, and in growing anticipation of the Good News: “**He Is Risen!**” **Lent** is a forty-day season (*not including the Sundays in Lent*), and the liturgical color is violet (*purple*).

The **Season of Lent** ends on the **Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)**, commemorating Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. This begins **Holy Week**, with three major observances: **Maundy Thursday** (*a time of remembering Christ’s last evening before His crucifixion, and of the institution of the Lord’s Supper*); **Good Friday** (*the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and the most solemn day in the Church Calendar*); and **Holy Saturday** (*commonly called the Vigil of Easter*). **Lent** and **Holy Week** lead into the high-point of the Church year, the **Resurrection of Our Lord, or Easter Sunday**. The color for Easter and its season is white or gold (*gold is used only on Easter Sunday*).

The Church celebrates the **Easter Season** with three important festivals over a period of 50 days. Of course, the first is that of the **Resurrection of our Lord**. The second important observance is the **Ascension of Our Lord** into heaven (*40 days after Easter*), while the third is that of the **Day of Pentecost (one of the three major festivals of the Church, and also the beginning of the Season of Pentecost or the Sundays after Pentecost)**.

Actually, the **Season of Pentecost** (*approximately 30 weeks*) is an extension of **Easter** itself, in which the Church celebrates from Sunday to Sunday the life-giving words and works of our Savior, and our faith response of obedience and discipleship. The liturgical color is green. Important celebrations during the Season of Pentecost include: The Holy Trinity, honoring the Doctrine of the Trinity; Christ the King (the last Sunday after Pentecost), celebrating our kinship with Christ; Reformation Day, observing the Reformation and its emphasis on “**justification by grace through faith**”; and the “Priesthood of All Believers”, All Saints Day, commemorating all the people (*or saints of God*); and a Day of National Thanksgiving, praising God for His many blessings.

Thus the whole Church Year, with its many varying seasons, is honored by the Christian Church in grateful response to the redeeming grace of the Triune God. Further, the Church remembers in grateful devotion to God the great Apostles, martyrs, saints, and angels who were a part of her history. These special commemorative days in the Church Calendar, along with the Seasons of the Church, help us translate the Church’s Confession of our Savior into the experiences of our own life in the real of time.

**✠ TO GOD ALONE BE THE GLORY ✠**