

RESURRECTION LUTHERAN CHURCH and SCHOOL

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The Church Year

Few people could operate without a calendar, noting important dates, engagements, and anniversaries. **The Church also follows a special calendar called the Church Year.** In the Old Testament God required His people to follow a religious calendar. As the modern-day Church observes the Church Year, it encourages a bond of unity between today's worshippers and those of ancient times.

The Church Year is a calendar which helps set the theme and mood of every service of worship. By following a calendar a congregation is provided not only a variety of worship (the calendar influences the choice of sermon of Christian truth and doctrine. The early Christians set aside Sunday (*the day of the Resurrection*) as the day of worship. The great events in the life of the Church (*i.e., Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost*) were especially celebrated. In the course of time, a well-rounded Church Year, centering around the life and works of Jesus, was developed.

The Church Year is divided into two major parts: **a) the Festival Cycle (or the Half-Year of the Lord)**, which focuses our attention on what God has accomplished for all people; and **b) the Non-Festival Cycle (or the Half-Year of the Church)**, which emphasizes our response to God's love and concern for us.

The **Festival Half-Year of the Church Calendar** is basically organized around the three great festivals of the Church: **Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.** The **Christmas Cycle** begins with **Advent** (*four Sundays before Christmas Day*) and lasts through the **Epiphany Season** (*which is from one to six weeks, depending upon the date of Easter*). **Christmas** itself chronicles the **Incarnation** (*God becoming man*) of Jesus Christ, as we behold the love of God for all humankind.

The **Easter Cycle** celebrates the **Resurrection of our Lord**, who broke the bonds of sin and death for us. This cycle begins with the **Lenten Season**, and contains significant events that lead up to the **Easter** celebration (*i.e., Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday*). The **post-Easter Sundays** look back on the glorious **Easter** event, and lead us to look forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit, which is the third festival: **The Day of Pentecost.**

The **Pentecost Festival** includes **Ascension Day**, which celebrates the **Ascension of our Lord Jesus to heaven**. The celebration climaxes with the **Festival of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost)**, as we rejoice in the coming of the Comforter into our hearts and lives.

The **Non-Festival Cycle** (often referred to as the **Sundays after Pentecost, or the Propers**) contains from twenty-two to twenty-seven Sundays, with no major festivals. During this cycle the Church studies the phases of a Christian's life, emphasizing the response of Christian discipleship to the call of God's love. Special days in the **Non-Festival Cycle** are: **a) The Reformation festival (October 31)** which commemorates the Protestant Reformation; **b) All Saints Day (November 1)** commemorating both the Christians who are now in heaven, and those who still labor on this earth; and **c) Thanksgiving Day**, a day of National "Giving Thanks" to God for all His blessings.

A Word On The MAJOR FESTIVALS Of The Church

If you were asked to name the most memorable times in your life, which would you list? You might note your birthday, wedding anniversary, the date of your Baptism or Confirmation, high-school or college graduation, your children's births, a job promotion, etc. But what if you were asked to narrow the list to the two or three most significant?

Likewise, the Church Year is full of special days: feasts, festivals and memorials, commemorating special events in the life and history of God's people. Three of them, however, are by far most prominent: **Christmas**, the birth of our Savior; **Easter**, the celebration of Jesus' resurrection; and **Pentecost**, the fulfilling of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit. These three festivals are the foundation for all the other special celebrations on the Church Calendar.

Christmas, or the **Nativity of Our Lord**, is the first major festival in the Church Year. Christmas, always on December 25, celebrates "**God becoming man**" - the love God has for all people proved by the sending of His Son, Jesus, into the flesh (to be fully human!) - into a sinful world. The liturgical color for **Christmas** is white, symbolizing the purity of Jesus and our joy at His birth.

Easter, or the **Resurrection of Our Lord**, is the *Queen* of all Christian festivals. This tremendous event, signifying Jesus' triumph over sin, death, hell, and Satan (and the Father's acceptance of His sacrificial death) became at once the center of the Church's faith, life, and

worship. **Easter** does not have a set date, but is always celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon which occurs after March 21. The liturgical color for **Easter** is gold or white, symbolizing the power of Christ's Resurrection and our triumph with Him over the bonds of darkness.

The Day of Pentecost is the third major festival, following seven weeks after **Easter**. **Pentecost** celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers, and His work in directing the mission of the Church. In essence, **Pentecost** is the "birth date" of the Christian Church, which is charged with the task of proclaiming Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgical color for **The Day of Pentecost** is red, suggesting the tongues of fire of that first Pentecost, and the victorious zeal believers are to show in sharing the good news of Jesus our Lord.