

The Christian church year is living history. It is ancient events brought to life each year – it is history that is alive as the church itself.

The “CHURCH YEAR” is a cycle of festivals and seasons. The first half of the year (Advent through Pentecost Day) recalls events in the life of Christ, making them real for us in the present. The rest of the Church Year (Pentecost Season) focuses on discipleship – the new life of Christ in which we are living and growing. We continue to observe the seasons because it celebrates God’s redemption.

When we observe the Church Year festivals and seasons, we:

- Learn the words and acts of God that have changed history;
- Remember the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord for us;
- Participate in these saving events through which our Lord creates his Church and transforms our lives.

The Church Year revolves around three great festival days – Christmas, Easter and Pentecost – and the seasons that *connect them* – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Pentecost or “Ordinary” Time.

Below is a chart to help you visualize –



Advent –

4 weeks of preparation for Christ’s coming.

Christmas Season –

12 days of celebration of Christ’s birth, leading to Epiphany, the “Christmas of the Gentiles.” (The twelve days of Christmas begin 12/25 and end early January.)

Epiphany Season –

4 to 9 weeks of thanks for Christ's revelation to the world, including the Baptism of Our Lord.

Lenten Season –

Ash Wednesday followed by 40 days of preparation, concluding during Holy Week.

Holy Week –

Palm or Passion Sunday followed by the Easter Triduum (the three days beginning with the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday and ending on Easter Sunday).

Easter Season – Easter Day followed by 50 days of rejoicing, including Ascension Day, leading to the season's climax, Pentecost day.

Pentecost Season (Ordinary Time) –

24 weeks from Holy Trinity Sunday to Christ the King Sunday. The festival of All Saints is celebrated late in this season. The Day of Pentecost is the promise of Jesus to his disciples and us that "I will not leave you alone." He said he was sending the Holy Spirit or Counselor to be a kind of "Heavenly Helper" for those who follow Christ, teaching us, leading us, inspiring us, encouraging us. The coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated on the Day of Pentecost – 50 days after Easter. The word Pentecost was taken from the Jews – for them it was the end of the Feast of Weeks, celebrating the grain harvest, the giving of the Law, and the founding of the Jewish faith community. This day is celebrated with Red, reminding us of the offering of life – lives of Christian martyrs gone before us and our own lives – in the service of our Lord.

What about all those "Words" and "Colors"?

Advent = a Latin word meaning a "coming" or "arrival."

Advent Colors = Purple is the ancient color of royalty as well as penitence, signaling the coming of our King. The more recent use of blue among Protestants symbolizes the hope of God's people who trust in their unfailing Lord and King.

Advent Wreath = Traditionally three purple or blue and one pink are placed around a circular wreath plus one central candle representing our hope in the Light of the World, whom the powers of darkness cannot overcome.

All Saints Day = we are inheritors of what generations of Christians before us passed on to us; we are temporary caretakers of today's church. Though they are gone, those who "died in the Lord" live very much in his care. All Saints Day celebrates the connection between the Church Triumphant (those gone before us) and the Church Militant (us), the saints of the Lord Jesus on earth and those in heaven.

Alleluia = a Hebrew word meaning "praise the Lord" which appears in the New Testament as part of the grand victory celebrations in the Book of Revelation.

Ascension = the word means "a rising up" and should remind us of the movement in worship of persons ascending to the altar as to the presence of God.

Emmanuel = or Immanuel is Hebrew for "God is with us". Isaiah the prophet promised that the Lord would come to be with his people. As a sign of this promise, the baby in Isaiah 7:14 was called "God is with us."

Epiphany = a Greek word meaning "appearing" or "revealing" – the revealing of God in his Son to the nations of the world. White is used during the first week after the day of the Epiphany and the rest of the season is represented by green.

Eucharist = a Greek word meaning "Thanksgiving." Used in the Lord's Supper because of the thanks we give for this holy meal in the prayer spoken by the pastor during the consecration of the bread and wine.

Holy Week = marked by the great three days (Latin: Triduum), the pivotal events of salvation history: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday's Easter Vigil and morning celebration.

Lent = an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "Spring." The number 40 is attached to historic events – the flood, Moses' days on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness, Jesus' fasting and prayer in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. The colors during Lent is usually violet for repentance during most of Lent and black for mourning on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Messiah = is the Hebrew word meaning "anointed one," that is, the "chosen one." The Greek name "Christ" means the same.

***There'll be no test! But if you'd like to learn more about the church year or the celebrations and seasons of the church, ask the church office or your pastor as we have great resources to share with you!