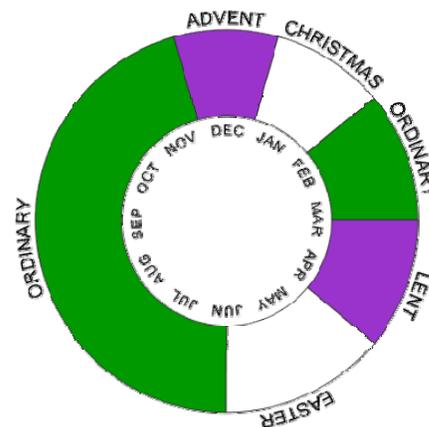


# An Introduction to the Christian Liturgical Year

## Complexities of Calendars:

- **Astronomical Foundations:** days (terrestrial); weeks (why 7?); months (lunar); years (solar)
- 1. **Lunar Calendars (Islamic):** exactly 12 lunar months (29 or 30 days) each year (total 354 or 355 days), so “months” do not remain in the same agricultural “seasons” each year.
- 2. **Solar Calendars (*Julian/Gregorian*):** 365 days most years, but 366 days in “leap years”; “months” are *not lunar* (first day of a new “month” is not tied to the “new moon”)
- 3. **Luni-solar Calendars:** some features based on moon and others based on sun!
  - **Chinese & Jewish:** mostly lunar; “leap months” keep annual festivals in sync w/ solar seasons
  - **Christian Liturgical:** primarily solar, but Easter (Lent to Pentecost) based on lunar calendar
- **Further Variations in Calendars:**
  - Different starting years & different year numbers
  - Different days for celebration of “New Year”
  - Different beginning time for each new “day”
  - Different “most important day” of the week



## Major Seasons of the Western Christian Liturgical Year

- **Season of ADVENT**
  - Time of watchful/joyful preparation for the Lord’s Coming, “first coming” (Christmas) and “second coming” (Parousia).
  - Begins four Sundays before Christmas (Nov. 27 to Dec. 3); thus 3-4 weeks long, only rarely four full weeks
- **Season of CHRISTMAS**
  - Celebrates the Incarnation/Nativity/Birth of Jesus Christ; not just *Christmas Day*, but continues several weeks *after*.
  - **Christmas Day:** Dec. 25 (begins Dec. 24 eve); can be any weekday.
  - **Christmas Octave:** intensive celebration for eight days, with other feasts, up to Jan. 1
  - **Christmas Season:** celebration continues through the Epiphany, up to the Baptism of the Lord.
    - **Epiphany of the Lord:** traditionally Jan. 6; now the Sunday between Jan. 2 and 8.
    - **Baptism of the Lord:** usually the Sunday after Epiphany; ends the Christmas Season.
- **Season of Ordinary Time - I (begins)**
  - Also called “Ordered Time” or the “Season of the Year” (Sundays sequentially numbered).
  - First part of Ord. Time begins after Christmas season and runs up until Lent.
  - Varies between 4 and 9 weeks long (since Christmas season can end between Jan. 8 and Jan. 13, and Lent can begin as early as Feb. 5 or as late as March 10).
  - For details, see my charts of the [Liturgical Calendar from 1969 to 2050](#).
  - Called “*Season of Epiphany*” by Anglicans and some Protestant Christians.
- **Season of LENT**
  - As preparation for Easter, Lent has both a penitential and baptismal character.
  - Lent is thought to be “forty days” long, but its actual length has changed over the centuries.
  - **Ash Wednesday:** a day of fasting and abstinence; Catholics receive a cross of ashes on their foreheads as a sign of our mortality and repentance.
  - **Passion/Palm Sunday:** Sunday before Easter; commemorates entry of Jesus into Jerusalem; Synoptic Passion Narratives are read (Matthew, Mark, and Luke, on a 3-year rotating cycle)
  - **Holy Week:** week before Easter, beginning Palm Sunday and including Easter Triduum.
- **Season of EASTER**
  - Celebrates “Paschal Mystery”: Death & Resurrection of Jesus (central event of Christianity)
  - Date of Easter is variable: *the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox*.

- **Easter Triduum:** “three holy days” from Holy Thursday evening to Easter Sunday evening:
  - **Holy Thursday:** commemorates the “Last Supper” of Jesus with his disciples; the liturgy traditionally includes “the Washing of the feet” and is followed by a Eucharistic procession and a period of veneration of the Blessed Sacrament.
  - **Good Friday:** commemorates the Passion, Death, and Burial of Jesus; a special non-Eucharistic liturgy focuses on the Johannine Passion, the Veneration of the Cross, extensive Intercessory Prayers, and sharing of Communion.
  - **Holy Saturday:** commemorates the time when Jesus was in the tomb; no liturgical rites should be celebrated on this day (not before sundown).
  - **Easter Vigil:** begins the liturgical celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus; a special liturgy (celebrated Saturday after sunset, during the night, or Sunday before dawn) includes lighting of Easter Fire and Easter Candle, proclamation of Easter *Exsultet*, extensive readings from Old Testament, and Baptism of new Christians.
  - **Easter Sunday:** Day of Resurrection; includes renewal of Baptismal Promises for all.
- **Easter Octave:** eight days of intensive celebration, from Easter Sunday to 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (now a.k.a. “Divine Mercy Sunday” by Roman Catholics).
- **Easter Season:** continued celebration for fifty days (seven weeks) up to Feast of Pentecost.
- **Ascension of the Lord:** traditionally the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Easter; now often moved to 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday.
- **Pentecost Sunday:** seven weeks or fifty days after Easter; celebrates coming of Holy Spirit.
- **Season of Ordinary Time - II (continues)**
  - The rest of the liturgical year (up to 34 weeks total), from Monday after Pentecost Sunday until First Sunday of Advent (beginning of next liturgical year).
  - Several special celebrations fall soon after Pentecost:
    - **Most Holy Trinity:** Sunday after Pentecost
    - **Body and Blood of Christ:** traditionally Thursday, now Sunday after Trinity Sunday
    - **Sacred Heart of Jesus:** Friday after 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost
  - Other celebrations related to Jesus, Mary, or Saints can be celebrated on weekdays
    - Some “**Solemnities of the Lord and of the Saints**” can be celebrated on Sundays
    - Feast of **Christ the King:** 34<sup>th</sup> or Last Sunday of Ord. Time
  - This larger part of Ord. Time is called “*Season of Pentecost*” by Anglicans & some Protestants.

### Liturgical Colors:

- **Advent - Purple** most days, except *Rose* (opt.) on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (“*Gaudete* Sunday”)
- **Christmas - White or Gold** (not red and green!), except for *Red* on the feast days of martyrs
- **Lent - Purple** most days; *Rose* (opt.) on 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (“*Laetare* Sunday”); **Red** on Palm Sunday
- **Easter Triduum - White or Gold** on Holy Thursday and at the Easter Vigil; **Red** on Good Friday
- **Easter Season - White or Gold** on most days, except for **Red** on Pentecost Sunday
- **Ordinary Time - Green**, except for particular feasts or occasions that have other designated colors
- **Special Colors** for Particular Celebrations within any Liturgical Season:
  - **White** - Solemnities of the Lord and the Saints; memorials of saints (other than martyrs); major local feasts; and funeral liturgies (Black is now also allowed again for funerals)
  - **Red** - Feasts and memorials of the Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, or the Holy Spirit

### Categories of Special Masses and Liturgies:

- **Saints** - four categories: Solemnities, Feasts, Memorials, and Optional Memorials
- **Ritual Masses** - incl. Christian Initiation (adults or children; baptism, confirmation, first communion), Conferral of Holy Orders, Pastoral Care of Sick, Sacrament of Marriage, Religious Profession, etc.
- **Masses for Various Occasions** - four subcategories: *Holy Church* (incl. pope, pastoral meetings, unity of Christians, etc.); *Public Needs* (civil leaders, peace & justice, etc.); *Various Public Circumstances* (new year, refugees, natural disasters, etc.); and *Various Needs* (promotion of charity, family, etc.)
- **Votive Masses** - Holy Trinity, Holy Cross, Holy Eucharist, Christ the High Priest, Holy Name of Jesus, Precious Blood, Sacred Heart, Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, Holy Apostles, All the Saints, etc.
- **Masses for the Dead** - incl. Funeral Liturgies and Memorial Masses for Adults and Children