



# The Beginners Guide TO THE Liturgical Calendar

By Aaron Damiani, author of *Earth Filled With Heaven: Finding Life in Liturgy, Sacraments and other Ancient Practices of the Church*

The liturgical calendar helps Christians live the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ all year. Sometimes referred to as the “church calendar,” this annual cycle connects us with Christians around the world and in history. But where do we start and how does it work? At first this can feel intimidating and confusing to the uninitiated.

This beginners guide gives a brief overview of each season and provides Scriptures and spiritual practices to get you started. To go deeper, check out the suggested resources.

## Advent

**Advent** is the beginning of the liturgical year and begins 4 weeks before Christmas (usually late November or early December). Advent is a season of waiting expectantly for the coming of Jesus Christ, which will usher in his eternal reign of justice and peace.

**Color:** purple, signifying Jesus' royalty and our repentance

**Scriptures to read:** Isaiah 11 & 40, Matthew 3:1-12, Matt 25, Psalm 146, 1 Thessalonians 4-5

**Practice:** use an Advent wreath at your table. [Here's one simple guide.](#)

**Advent Prayer:** "Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen." - from *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019).

## Christmas

**Christmas** is one season that many people know about and participate in already! Christmas, or Christmastide, celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ which signifies that the light of Christ has pierced our dark world. In the liturgical calendar, this season lasts 12 full days, beginning on December 25.

**Color:** White or gold, signifying joy and the purity of the light of Christ.

**Scriptures to read:** Isaiah 9:1-7, John 1:1-18, Luke 2:1-20, Psalm 96

**Practice:** Feast and give gifts! You can practice spreading the feasting out beyond one day and try giving a gift to someone who cannot pay you back.

**Christmas Prayer:** "O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grand that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen." - from *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019).

## Epiphany

**Epiphany** highlights the unveiling of the glory of Christ to the nations: his baptism, first miracles, and finally his transfiguration. As we behold His glory, we find, like His disciples, that we are being transformed by His light.

**Color:** white (for the first Sunday of Epiphany, signifying Christ's glory) followed by green (signifying spiritual growth as we behold Christ together).

**Scriptures to read:** Isaiah 60:1-9, Ephesians 3:1-13, Matthew 2:1-12, Psalm 72

**Spiritual practice:** House blessing, including a fun tradition known as "chalking the door." [Click here for a video demonstration](#) of how the author and his family did a house blessing, complete with a printable guide for your own house.

**Epiphany prayer:** "Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen." - from *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019).

**THE 3 GREAT FEASTS:** At the end of Eastertide, the church celebrates three great feasts: Ascension Sunday, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. Courtesy of Christ Church Madison, here are three fun, ways to celebrate these feasts at home or church. This is a season of renewed mission, so remember to invite the wider community!

**Ascension Sunday** is the 40th day of Eastertide. On or near this day, we remember Christ ascending to the Father's right hand (Acts 1). *Practice:* try a church-wide kite flying day.



**Pentecost Sunday** marks the sending of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church (Acts 2). The color changes to red, signifying the fire of the Holy Spirit. *Practice:* hold a community bonfire (check your local ordinances first).



**Trinity Sunday** is the celebration of the beautiful mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:16-20). *Practice:* organize a square dance and hire a caller!



## Lent

**Lent** is a 40 day season (not including Sundays) of repentance, self-denial and spiritual training in preparation for Easter.

**Scriptures to read:** Psalm 51, Joel 2:1-17, Matthew 4:1-11, Romans 5:12-21

**Color:** purple, indicating repentance

**Practice:** Take up fasting, increased prayer and financial generosity during this season to make room in your soul for the joy of Easter. For a beginner's guide to Lent, check out [\*The Good of Giving Up: Discovering the Freedom of Lent\*](#).

**Lenten prayer:** "Heavenly Father, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you: Look with compassion upon the heartfelt desires of your servants, and purify our disordered affections, that we may behold your eternal glory in the face of Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen." – from *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019).

## Holy Week

**Holy Week** is the final week of Lent, when we walk with Jesus through the final week of his life: his royal procession, humble foot-washing and final meal with his disciples, his death, and finally his glorious resurrection. By following Jesus on the way to his Cross, we find our own road of suffering to become the way of life and peace.

**The major events of Holy Week include:**

**Palm Sunday**, celebrating his humble, royal entrance into Jerusalem. **Scripture:** Matt 21:1-11.

**Color:** Red, symbolizing Christ's passion. **Practice:** use palm branches in your prayer time or worship service.

**Maundy Thursday**, commemorating Jesus' final meal with his disciples. **Scripture:** John 13:1-15. **Color:** Red. **Practice:** include foot washing and practice the Lord's Supper.

**Good Friday**, remembering Jesus' sacrifice for our sins on the cross. **Scripture:** John 19:1-37. **Color:** Purple (royalty and repentance). **Practice:** use a physical cross as a visual cue in prayer and worship.

**Easter Sunday**, celebrating Jesus' glorious resurrection! **Scripture:** John 20:1-18.  
**Color:** white or gold to mark the triumph and joy of Christ's victory over death. Some churches also celebrate a Vigil for Easter on Saturday night.

[Click here](#) for a free Holy Week prayer guide complete with Scriptures and original art.

**Holy Week Prayer:** "Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the Cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen." -from *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019).

“  
*By following Jesus on the way  
to his Cross, we find our own road  
of suffering to become the way  
of life and peace.*  
”

## Eastertide

**Eastertide** is 7 weeks of feasting, joy, generosity and restored hope as we mark Christ's 40 days on earth after his resurrection.

**Scriptures:** Psalm 116, 1 Pet 1:3-9, Luke 24:13-49

**Color:** white or gold, signifying Christ's victory and a season of feasting

**Practice:** Open your home for a season of feasting. Try including guests whom you have not hosted for a meal before.

**Eastertide prayer:** "Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may, by your life-giving Spirit, be delivered from sin and raised from death; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen." - from *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019).

## Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time is a season of spiritual growth, mission, and outreach. As with the early church in the book of Acts, we find that God does extraordinary things through our ordinary obedience. Ordinary Time stretches from late spring until the first Sunday of Advent, about five months.

**Color:** green, signifying spiritual growth and vitality

**Scriptures:** Matthew 5-7, 1 Corinthians 3, Psalm 1, Duet 11:18-32

**Practice:** Use the BLESS model of bearing humble witness to unchurched friends and neighbors. Join in God's mission and see what extraordinary things he does through his people!

**Special Sundays** near the end of Ordinary Time:

All Saints Day: white, Rev 7:9-17

Christ the King Sunday: white, Psalm 95 & Matt 25:31-46

**Ordinary Time prayer:** "O Lord, you have taught us that without love, all our deeds are worth nothing: Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the true bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before you; grant this for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen." - from *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019).

## Key dates for 2022 & 2023:

**Advent:** November 27- Dec 24, 2022

**Christmas:** Dec 25, 2022 - Jan 5, 2023

**Feast of the Epiphany:** Jan 6, 2023

**Season of Epiphany:** Jan 6- Feb 21, 2023

**Lent:** Feb 22, 2023 - April 8, 2023

**Ash Wednesday:** Feb 22, 2023

**Palm Sunday:** April 2, 2023

**Maundy Thursday:** April 6, 2023

**Good Friday:** April 7, 2023

**Easter Sunday:** April 9, 2023

**Eastertide:** April 9 - May 28, 2023

**Ascension Day:** May 18, 2023 (This falls on a Thursday, but can be celebrated on Sunday, May 21, 2023).

**Ordinary Time:** May 28- Dec 2, 2023

**Pentecost Sunday:** May 28, 2023

**Trinity Sunday:** June 4, 2023

**All Saints Day:** November 1, 2023 (often celebrated the following Sunday, Nov 5, 2023).

**Christ the King Sunday:** November 26, 2023

**Advent:** Dec 3 -24, 2023