

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- With Sundays at its center, the Church year follows a pattern of seasons.
- The Church calendar includes feasts, holy days, and saints' days.
- Colors, symbols, and themes have deep meanings.

The Church, like the Gospel writers, retells the story in time. Over the course of a year, the Church celebrates all these events, beginning with Christ's Incarnation and birth and ending with his Second Coming.

*"In the course of the year...[the Church] unfolds the whole mystery of Christ."*

CCC 1163

## The Church Year

Christians long to retrace the steps of Jesus and walk with him through his life on earth. The Gospel writers did it. Anyone who has made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land has done it. As we hear the stories and follow the path year after year, we discover new truths and understand more deeply.

The fulfillment of our salvation through Jesus begins with the annunciation—Mary's consent to the archangel Gabriel's announcement that she had been chosen by God to be the Mother of his Son (Luke 1:26–38). The story unfolds as the magi arrive with gifts and the Holy Family flees to Egypt (Matthew 2). We observe the presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22–38) and search with Mary and Joseph for their lost Child some years later (2:41–50).

We see Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan, at his first miracle at a wedding in Cana, and at the Sea of Galilee as he calls his first disciples. We see him in Jerusalem and walk with him as he carries his cross. We see the tomb where he was laid and where death was defeated by his resurrection. We watch him ascend to heaven and wait with Mary and the apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

- What part(s) of Jesus' story do you want to know more about?
- How can Jesus' story speak to and guide your own story?



## Liturgical Seasons

Like our natural year, the **Church year** follows a pattern of seasons. Also called the **liturgical year**, the Church year celebrates and relives the great events of our salvation. Each year follows a pattern, and our prayers and readings for Mass guide us in our celebrations.

### Advent

During **Advent**, we share in the Israelites' long wait for the Messiah and enter into expectation and anticipation for the coming of our Savior. The season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas.



This time is one of joyful anticipation, of waiting in hope with Mary for the birth of our Lord.



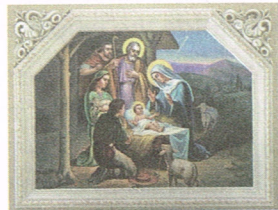
Catholics are encouraged to “keep Advent”—to avoid rushing into Christmas. In addition to preparing our hearts for the celebration of Christ’s birth, we also prepare our hearts for Jesus’ Second Coming and the fullness of the kingdom. An important way we prepare is by examining our lives and celebrating the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

*Liturgical color:* violet for royalty, humility, and hope

*Traditions:* Advent wreaths and calendars that help families count down to Christmas are common traditions. An Advent wreath is made of evergreen and holds four candles: three purple (violet) and one pink (rose). Each of the four Sundays of Advent is marked by the lighting of a candle. The candle for the third Sunday is pink as a sign of our joy that Christmas is near.

### Christmas

The **Christmas** season marks the birth of Jesus. It lasts from Christmas Day until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord in early January. There are many special celebrations during this season.



*Liturgical color:* white for light, innocence, and joy

*Traditions:* Many Catholics intentionally leave up the Christmas tree, continue to display the Nativity scene, and joyfully sing Christmas carols and hymns long after the secular world sets them aside.

### Ordinary Time

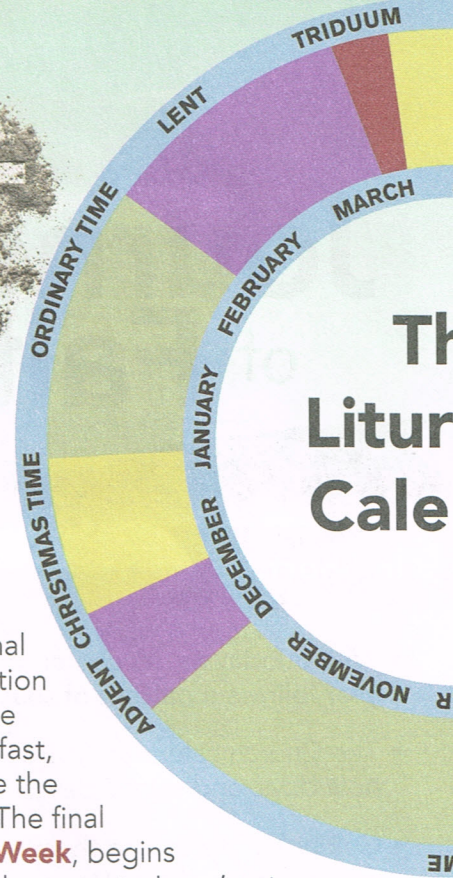
**Ordinary Time** follows the Christmas season for several weeks. It’s a time for reflecting on the mystery of Christ’s life and growing as a Church.



*Liturgical color:* green for growth and eternal life

### Lent

**Lent** is a penitential season that lasts forty days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending at the start of the Easter Triduum. During Lent, Catholics prepare themselves for the holiest days of the year. In anticipation of the renewal of their baptismal promises and the reception of new members into the Church, Catholics pray, fast, give alms, and celebrate the sacrament of penance. The final week, also called **Holy Week**, begins with **Palm Sunday**, which recounts Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–9) and his suffering and death that follow.



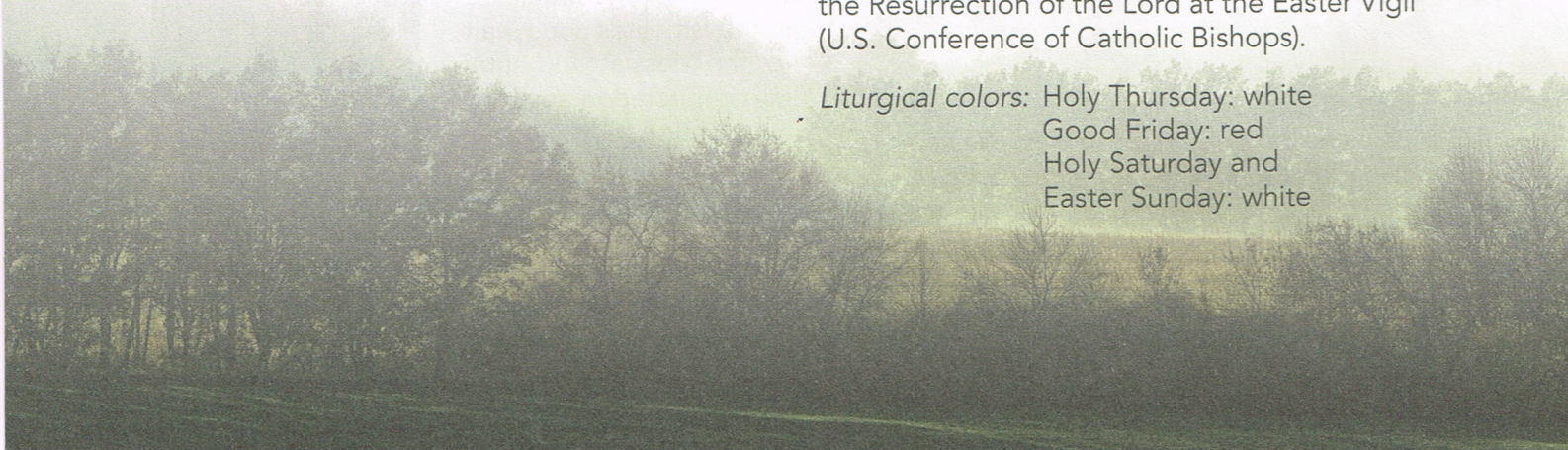
*Liturgical color:* violet for **penitence**: sorrow and repentance for one’s sins

### Triduum

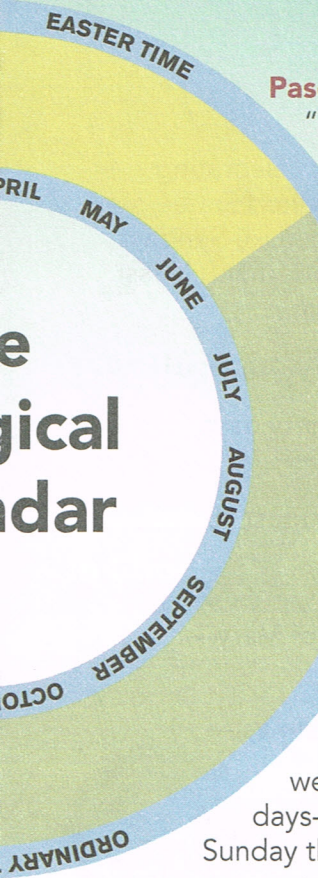
The **Triduum**, Latin for “three days,” begins with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening and continues through Good Friday and Holy Saturday until the evening of Easter Sunday. “Though chronologically three days, they are liturgically one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ’s paschal mystery. The single celebration of the Triduum marks the end of the Lenten season, and leads to the Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil” (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops).



*Liturgical colors:* Holy Thursday: white  
 Good Friday: red  
 Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday: white







**Paschal Mystery:**

“referring to the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by which he brought about salvation for all humanity” (A to Z: A Basic Catholic Dictionary).



**Easter**

During the **Easter** season, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his victory over sin and death. This season is so important that we can’t celebrate it in a day or even a week. We celebrate Easter for fifty days—a week of weeks—from Easter Sunday through Pentecost Sunday.

*Liturgical color: white for light, victory, and glory*

*“We are an Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song.”*

*Attributed to St. Augustine*

Since Jesus died during the Jewish Passover festival, the date of Easter is calculated accordingly. At the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), it was decided that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon following the first day of spring. This means Easter doesn’t occur on the same date each year—unlike Christmas, which always falls on December 25.

**Ordinary Time**

Ordinary Time returns following the Easter season and ends the last Sunday before Advent: the feast of Christ the King. Ordinary Time is a time for reflecting on the mystery of Christ’s life and growing as a Church.

*Liturgical color: green for growth and eternal life*

**Rhyme and Reason**

Our lives follow rhythms similar to the cycle of the Church year. Whether these rhythms are in step or not, the Church guides us through the cycle and seasons of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

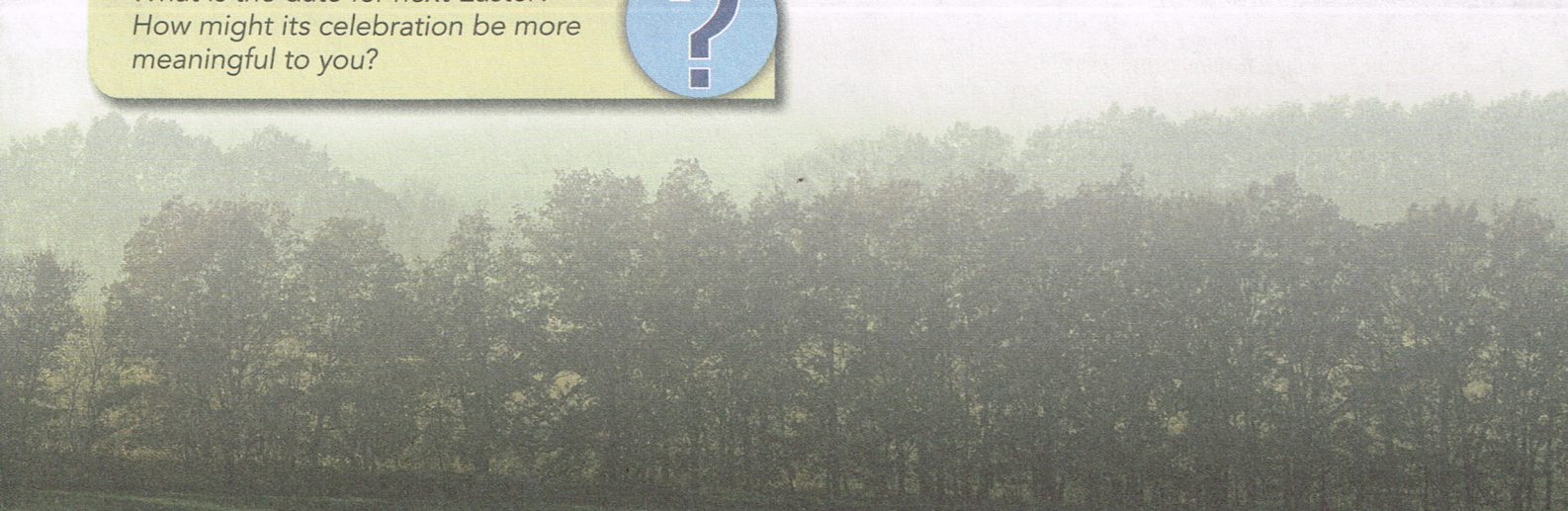
On our high days—times of discovery, accomplishment, fulfillment, commitment, and authenticity—the Church shows us how to celebrate these gifts with joy.

In times of disappointment, struggle, weakness, failure, and loss, the Church reminds us that light follows darkness, spring follows winter, and Easter follows Good Friday.

In times of coming and going, falling down and getting back up, learning to love and asking for forgiveness, the Church reminds us of God’s faithful and enduring presence.

As we move through the liturgical year, with its different themes and postures of the heart, we support and celebrate the times of Advent waiting and Christmas celebrations, the sorrows of Good Friday and Easter joys of new life and community. The Church year helps us connect our own stories with the story of God, helping us find greater meaning in every part of life.

- What is the date for next Easter? How might its celebration be more meaningful to you?





## The Importance of Sunday

*“The Lord’s day, the day of Resurrection, the day of Christians, is our day. It is called the Lord’s day because on it the Lord rose victorious to the Father. If pagans call it the ‘day of the sun,’ we willingly agree, for today the light of the world is raised, today is revealed the sun of justice with healing in his rays.”*

*St. Jerome, In die dominica paschae homilia, CCL 78, 550*

Sunday, the “Lord’s day,” is central to our liturgical life. Our observance begins on the Saturday evening before, and all Catholics are obligated to participate in Mass every weekend. There, “the Lord’s Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet” (CCC 1166).

The Church also encourages us to treat Sunday as a day of rest, recreation, and family time as a way of keeping the Third Commandment: “Remember the sabbath day—keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:8–10).

- How do you spend Sundays?
- How can you “keep it holy?”



## Holy Days of Obligation

The Church year is full of **feast days** celebrating Jesus, Mary, and the saints. In the United States, six of these are **holy days of obligation**. Like Sundays, Catholics make these days holy by attending Mass and refraining from unnecessary work:

- Mary, the Holy Mother of God—January 1
- The **Ascension** of the Lord—forty days after Easter or the following Sunday
- The **Assumption of Mary**—August 15
- All Saints’ Day—November 1
- The **Immaculate Conception** of Mary—December 8
- The **Nativity** of the Lord (Christmas)—December 25



Reflect on your typical day, week, or year. What routines or traditions do you have? When is your next vacation, family celebration, or home improvement? Mark the following:

- Times of high energy or positive emotion
- Times of study or preparation
- Times of calm, quiet, or relaxation
- Fixed or set times
- Flexible or movable times
- Times with community

Pray to God and invite him to be part of all the “times” of your life.

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