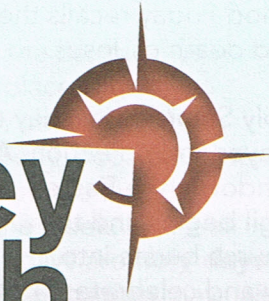


# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- The Church follows a liturgical calendar.
- Each liturgical season has its own symbols, themes, and colors.
- The liturgical calendar includes feast days, holy days, and saints days.
- All the liturgical elements combine for a fuller understanding of the paschal mystery.



The liturgy in which Catholics participate most often is Sunday Mass, which can also be celebrated on Saturday night. Through our active involvement in the liturgy, we become Christ's body—his hands, arms, eyes, and heart—here on earth. As Christians, we are responsible for proclaiming Christ to the world.

*"As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ."*

1 Corinthians 12:12

## The Church Year

- Describe a tradition in your family or close group of friends that is especially important and meaningful to you. Perhaps a Christmas tradition, a birthday tradition, or a summer vacation tradition comes to mind.
- Why is this particular tradition important to you? How do traditions help to bind friends and families together?



### The Liturgical Calendar or Cycle

The **liturgical year** or **Church year** is the Church's way of remembering and celebrating the great events of our salvation through Jesus Christ. Each year follows a pattern, and the readings and prayers for Mass have been organized to fit into it. Like the seasons we experience through nature, the liturgical year has seasons, each with its own special emphasis and traditions.

### Advent

The season of **Advent** marks the beginning of the Church year. Advent is celebrated during the four weeks before Christmas and is a time of anticipation and quiet waiting for the Messiah. The Church invites us to remember that just as Christ grew in his mother's womb some 2,000 years ago, today we must allow him to grow in our hearts. Advent looks to both the past, Christ's birth in the town of Bethlehem, and the future, the unknown time when Christ will come again.



## The Meaning of Liturgy

The word *liturgy* originally meant "work of the people." Catholic liturgy is "the participation of the People of God in 'the work of God'" (CCC 1069). Through the liturgy, Jesus Christ continues in the work of our redemption. Liturgy involves us in the life of the Church and requires the full participation of everyone.

## Christmas

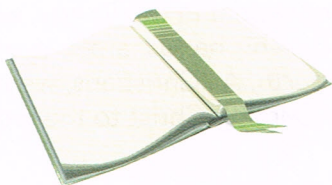
December 25, the feast of the birth of Christ, marks the beginning of the **Christmas** season. The Christmas season includes the solemnity of Mary the Mother of God



on January 1, the feast of the Holy Family on the first Sunday after Christmas, and the feast of the Epiphany. While we may think of the Epiphany as being the discovery of the Christ Child by the three wise men, its real meaning is that Christ comes for the salvation of everyone. The celebration of the Baptism of the Lord, usually the third Sunday after Christmas, ends the Christmas season.

## Ordinary Time

**Ordinary Time** is that time in the yearly cycle that falls outside the other seasons. During Ordinary Time, the mystery of Christ in all its fullness is reflected upon and celebrated. This makes it a time of growth both for us as individuals and for our entire faith community.



## Lent

The season of **Lent** begins with Ash Wednesday. Lent is a penitential season, meaning we focus on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We perform acts of charity and self-denial to improve and purify our lives in preparation for the celebration of Easter.



Lent lasts forty days, modeled after Jesus' forty days in the desert, as told in the Gospel of Matthew 4:1–11. Lent ends at the Mass of the Lord's Supper, which is part of Holy Week. **Holy Week** is the week beginning with Palm Sunday leading up to Easter Sunday. Holy Week also includes the Easter Triduum.

## Easter Triduum

The Easter **Triduum** is a three-day celebration. Holy Thursday recalls the Last Supper and Jesus' first celebration of the holy Eucharist. As an important part of the Last Supper, the liturgy of this evening emphasizes Jesus' command to wash one another's feet, meaning we must serve one another.



Good Friday recalls the suffering and death of Jesus.

Holy Saturday is a day of prayer and reflection. At sundown, the Easter Vigil begins and the Church bursts into joy and celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. This is the night when the Church traditionally welcomes new members who then receive the sacraments of initiation—baptism (if they have not yet been baptized in a Christian church), confirmation, and holy Eucharist.

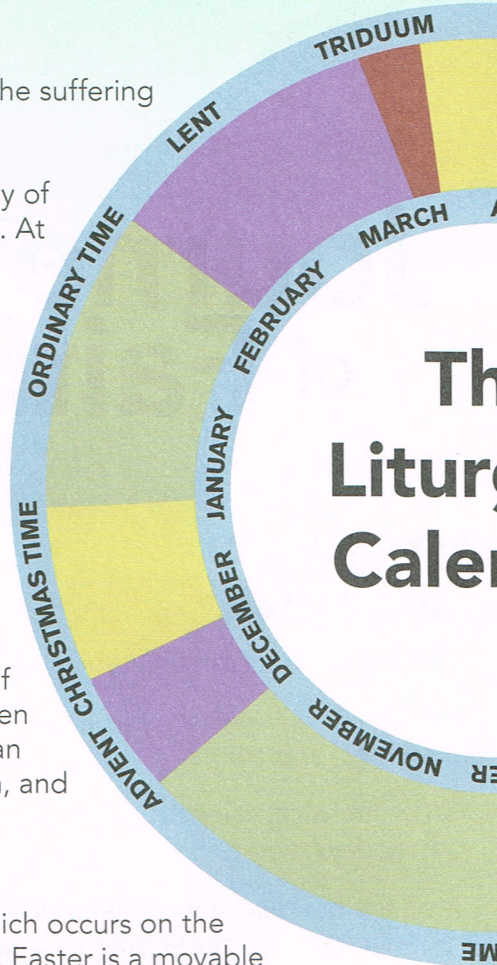
## Easter

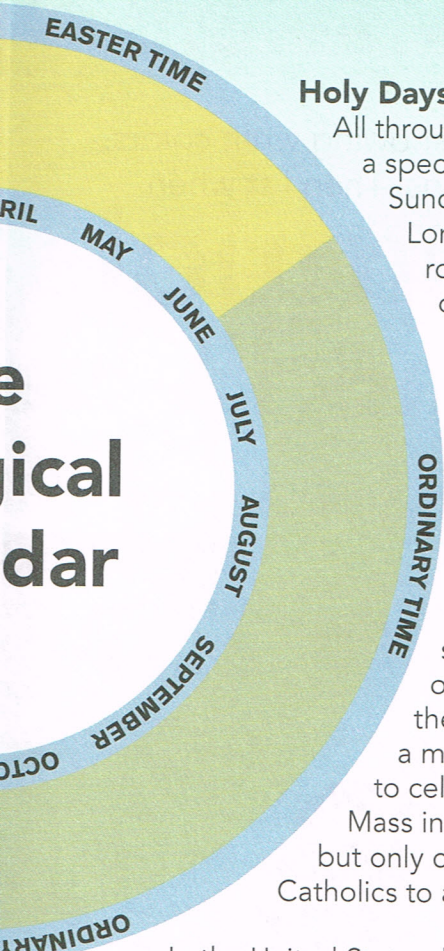
Unlike Christmas, which occurs on the same day every year, Easter is a movable feast. This means the Sunday we celebrate Easter changes each year. As a way to keep the celebration of Easter consistent among new Christians of different cultures and calendars, it was determined that Easter would be celebrated the Sunday after the paschal full moon, which is the first full moon on or after the spring equinox, March 21. This means Easter can fall between March 22 and April 25. **Easter** morning begins the fifty-day period of celebrating the resurrection of Jesus called the Easter season. It concludes with the important feast of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, which celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit who fills us, like the first disciples, with the power to bring Jesus to the world.



## Ordinary Time

The Easter season is followed by a long period of Ordinary Time that ends just before Advent with the feast of Christ the King. This brings us full circle in our celebration of the liturgical year.





## Holy Days

All through the liturgical year, a special place is given to Sunday, observed as the Lord's day, because Christ rose on the first day of the week. While all Sundays are **holy days of obligation**, days all Catholics are called to celebrate the Mass, some holy days of obligation fall on other days of the week. **Feast days**, days we celebrate a particular saint or holy person, occur on many days of the Church year. It can be a meaningful experience to celebrate these days with Mass in addition to Sundays, but only certain feast days require Catholics to attend Mass.

In the United States, holy days of obligation include the **Immaculate Conception** (December 8), **the Nativity of the Lord** (Christmas), **Mary, the Holy Mother of God** (January 1), the **Ascension of the Lord** (forty days after Easter, although some

dioceses celebrate it on a Sunday during Easter season), the **Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (August 15), and **All Saints' Day** (November 1).

## Why Are Different Colors Used on Different Days?

The special feasts and seasons of the liturgical year are reflected in the church environment. Certain colors are used in the priest's vestments, altar decorations, and church banners to further express the meaning of the feast or season.

Purple or violet is used during both Advent and Lent. During Advent, the purple or violet color symbolizes anticipation and prayerful waiting. During Lent, the color represents penance and purification. Red, the color of blood, signifies Christ's sacrifice of his life; red is used on Passion (Palm) Sunday, Good Friday, and the feasts of martyrs. Red, also the color of fire, is used on Pentecost Sunday, too. White expresses joy, purity, and eternal life; it is used for most feasts of our Lord, for the seasons of Christmas and Easter, for funerals, for feasts of saints who are not martyrs, and for angels. Green, the color of growth, is symbolic of life and the life-giving nature of faith, hope, and love. It is used for Ordinary Time, the longest season in the Church year.

## What Are the Holy Days of Obligation?

**Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8):** celebrates Mary being preserved from original sin at her conception.

**Nativity of the Lord (December 25):** celebrates the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in Bethlehem.


**Mary the Holy Mother of God (January 1):** also called the Solemnity of Mary, celebrates Mary as the Mother of Jesus Christ.

**Ascension of the Lord (forty days after Easter):** celebrates Christ ascending, body and soul, into heaven.

**Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15):** celebrates Mary being taken up (or assumed) body and soul into heaven.

**All Saints' Day (November 1):** celebrates all those saints who have gone to heaven before us.

As a group or with a partner, create a chart, list, or other visual showing what colors, symbols, and traditions are associated with which Church seasons. Then list when during the year these seasons take place. Use your liturgical calendar.



How do Church traditions help to build closeness and community within the people of God?

Of the Catholic practices or traditions you have observed thus far, which holds the most meaning for you? Why?

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