

A Brief Introduction to the Christian Calendar

People mark their lives by seasons. Best known is winter, spring, summer, and fall. But people of faith have also marked their seasons in distinct ways, influenced by place and weather, but also scripture, tradition, ritual and the desire to connect our own story with God's great big story.

In the Christian Calendar, **Advent** marks the beginning of the new year. Advent is the approximately four weeks prior to Christmas. It is a time of waiting and preparation. Many people choose to fast. One of the very best ways to understand Advent may be how we understand pregnancy. In pregnancy, one abstains from certain things like alcohol that may be harmful to the baby. The nursery is prepared. Prayers and hopes and dreams are thought of over the child. In similar fashion, we can fast from certain things so that we might make more space for the Christ child. We can prepare our homes for His coming. We can pray and hope and dream.

Then we celebrate **Christmas**, the birth of the Savior. We celebrate His birth in our lives, our own births, and ponder how we might give birth to Christ in our own time and place. Christmas is a "feast time" – a time of celebration that lasts TWELVE days!

Next is the season of **Epiphany**. It is the time we "go tell it the mountain." It is the time we intentionally consider how we make Christ known.

Following Epiphany, we begin another season of fasting and preparation called **Lent**. Lent lasts forty days and we are reminded of the forty days of rain and flooding through which Noah sailed, the forty years through which the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness with Moses, and the forty days that Jesus went to the desert and fasted as he prepared for his ministry. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday in which we are reminded of our own mortality and called to "repent" or turn around from our wayward ways. Lent concludes with a journey through Holy Week that will retell the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem as people waved palm branches, of Jesus sharing the Last Supper with the disciples, of Jesus being betrayed and crucified and laid in a tomb.

Easter reminds us that the story does not end on the cross, but with the resurrection of Jesus. It is a FIFTY day celebration - a grand party, an exuberant feast - that rejoices in rebirth, new beginnings, redemption, and reconciliation.

Pentecost marks the end to the season of Easter and the start of "the season of the church." Pentecost is the birthday of the church. It is the beginning of "**ordinary time**." We intentionally consider how we order our days, how we live between fasting and feasting, how we find our way in our homes, schools, communities, countries, and world. In ordinary time, we find the sacred in the everyday.