

## THE CHURCH CALENDAR

Almost everyone in the world, past and present, marks significant life events - birthdays, anniversaries, historical events, and national holidays. When we do this, we pause to remember important times in our lives, the lives of our loved ones, and the life of our nation.

The nation of Israel marked its time around the events of the Passover - the Exodus from Egypt, the wilderness wandering, and the entrance into the Promised Land. The Jews made Passover the center of their lives and their calendar.

The Christian church marks its time around the ministry of Jesus. He is the center of our lives. We anticipate His coming. We celebrate His birth. We learn from Him as he walks the streets of Jerusalem. We watch the angry mob that screams for His death. We cry with the disciples on Golgotha. We wonder at the mystery of the empty tomb. We fearfully and joyfully put our fingers in the wounds of His risen body. We watch in amazement as Jesus ascends to heaven through the clouds. We experience the coming of the Holy Spirit and the formation of the church.

The early Christian Church developed a calendar to help Christians mark the important events in Jesus' life. This calendar provides a regular and systematic review of who Jesus is, what he teaches, and how we can live our lives with an eternal purpose. It helps us form a world view that is Christ centered and to progress through the year with a sense of kingdom purpose and an eye on eternity. The Church Calendar is divided into nine seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Ordinary Time, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost.

**Christ the King Sunday: November 20; Advent: November 27 - December 24**

The word *advent* means "coming" or "arrival." During the four weeks of Advent, we celebrate the first advent, the birth of Jesus, the creator God, who came to earth to live in His creation. The season of Advent also reminds us of the Second Advent, when Jesus will return to His creation to reclaim those who have received Him as their Lord and Savior. Advent also provides us with the opportunity to remember our own advent - when we asked Jesus to live in our hearts and to forgive us of our sin. The Sunday before Advent begins is called Christ the King

Sunday which marks Christ's kingship over heaven and earth and reminds us that all mankind must submit to Christ's rule.

### **Christmas: December 25 - January 5; Epiphany: January 6**

Christmas is the celebration of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The Christmas season is from December 24 through January 5 and has become known as the "Twelve Days of Christmas." This season concludes on Epiphany, January 6, which commemorates the coming of the wise men, the Magi, to worship the infant Jesus. Epiphany reminds us that Jesus, the Messiah of the nation of Israel is also the Redeemer of the world. Epiphany also reminds us of the mission of the church - to take the good news of Jesus to the whole world.

### **Ordinary Time: January 15 - February 26**

The season between Epiphany and Lent is called Ordinary Time. The term comes from the word *Ordinal* and simply means "counted time." This season is used to study and learn about Jesus' life, teachings, and miracles.

### **Lent: March 5 - April 2**

Lent literally means "spring." It is a season marked by prayer, fasting, and acts of charity. For the Christian, it is a time to prepare ourselves to remember the events that took Jesus to the cross. Lent provides us an opportunity to take a spiritual inventory of our lives, to ask ourselves - What or who is between us and Jesus? What can we do to be Christ in our world? How can we live out Christ's call in our lives?

### **Holy Week: April 9 - April 15**

Holy Week is the week from Palm Sunday to the Saturday before Easter, and it marks the following events in the life of Jesus:

**Palm Sunday:** Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly on a donkey.

**Monday:** Jesus cleanses the temple by throwing the money changers out.

**Tuesday:** Jesus teaches from the Mount of Olives.

**Wednesday:** Jesus rests.

**Thursday:** Jesus celebrates the Passover with His disciples.

**Friday:** Jesus is crucified.

**Saturday:** Jesus lies dead in the tomb.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who was executed by the Nazis, wrote a book called Cost of Discipleship. In it, he warned about "cheap grace" which does not take seriously either the gravity of sin or Jesus' radical call to servant hood: "When Jesus bids a man come, he bids him come and die." As we mark Holy Week, it is important that we do not have "cheap grace." We must perceive, with great clarity, the terrible cost of sin and its effects on the earth, on people, and on ourselves. Only as we come to grasp sin's great cost can we truly comprehend the great price that Jesus paid for our sin. Jesus offered himself in our place so that we do not have to pay the eternal price of sin. Jesus' sacrifice means that we can experience God's love, God's grace, God's mercy, and God's presence forever.

**Easter: April 16 - May 28; Ascension Sunday: May 28**

Easter Sunday is the center point of the Christian calendar. It marks Jesus' resurrection from the dead and His victory over sin. It is the central witness to a new act of God, and it vindicates Jesus as the Messiah. Easter Sunday marked the central confession of faith for the early church, and is the focal point for Christian worship. We continue to commemorate Easter by worshiping on the first day of each week, as Christians have done since the first century.<sup>1</sup> The Easter season consists of 7 Sundays - a week of Sundays - culminating with Ascension Sunday, the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday, which commemorates Christ return to heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God making intercession for us.

**Pentecost: June 4**

Pentecost marks the day that the church was established. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and filled the disciples with understanding and power. They boldly proclaimed that Jesus was Messiah and Lord. Pentecost shows us that God is active and working in our world through His Spirit and that it is through His church that God will accomplish His plan and reveal His glory. God desires to reach all mankind with the truth of the gospel. As we work within the church, we are a part of God's plan to reach our family, friends, community, and the entire world with the life-changing, life-fulfilling, life-inspiring message of Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Dennis Bratcher, The Easter Season Resurrection of the Lord, <http://www.cresourcei.org/cyeaster.html>