

The Christian Church Year

Specific Days and Holidays for 2009

Advent: Nov 30 – Dec 24 2008

Christmas: Dec 25 2007

The 12 Days of Christmas: Dec 25 to Jan 5 2009

Epiphany: Jan 6 2009

Ash Wednesday: Feb 25 2009

Lent: Mar 1 – Apr 11 2009

Holy Week: Apr 5 – 11 2009

Maundy Thursday: Apr 9 2009

Good Friday: Apr 10 2009

Easter: Apr 12 2009

Pentecost: May 31 2009

All Saints Day: Nov 1 2009

Thanksgiving: Nov 27 2009

Advent: Nov 29 – Dec 24 2009

Christmas: Dec 25 2009

The 12 Days of Christmas: Dec 25 to Jan 5 2010

Advent

The First aspect of the Christmas season is Advent. Advent means “The Coming”, when Christ first came and the anticipation of when he comes again. Advent is the beginning of the Church Year for most Christian churches. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas day, which is the Sunday nearest November 30, and ends on Christmas Eve (Dec 24). If Christmas Eve is a Sunday, it is counted as the fourth Sunday of Advent, with Christmas Eve proper beginning at sundown. It is important to remember that celebrating the Second Coming of Christ is essential for all Christians, for just as the people then drew strength and excitement looking towards the birth of the Messiah, we must do the same for when He returns again; if not more so, for those who do not know Jesus will be lost for eternity.

The beginning of Advent is a time for decoration the church and home with evergreen wreaths and trees that help to symbolize the new and everlasting life brought through Jesus the Christ. Some churches have a special weekday service, or the first Sunday evening of Advent, or possibly the first Sunday morning of Advent, in which the church is decorated and the Advent wreath put in place.

An essential symbol of the Advent season is the Advent Wreath. The circle of the wreath (advent or any other) reminds us of God Himself, His eternal and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end. The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that we have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal, of eternal life and was chosen because of its strength and durability over every other tree. The candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of His son. The four outer candles represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent, which themselves symbolize the time between the prophet Malachi prophecy of His birth and the birth of Christ.

Candles:

| | |
|--------------|---------------------|
| Three Purple | (can be Blue) |
| One Rose | (can be pink) |
| One White | (The Christ Candle) |

The four outer candles represent the 400 years from Malachi's prophecy of the coming of Christ till His arrival. (Though there were prophecies made around 700 years before Christ's birth, by Isaiah and Micah, Malachi's had a different affect on the people of Israel. Since the earlier prophecies the years had brought a widespread doubt of the coming of the Messiah and it was the prophecy of Malachi which refueled the vivid portrayal of the love of God as well as His gift for the world yet to come through His son Jesus Christ.) Just as their anticipation grew stronger the closer the fulfillment of this prophecy came near, so ours grows stronger as we near the day we celebrate Jesus' birth, and with the lighting of each candle the Light of Christ grows stronger.

The first candle is traditionally the candle of Expectation or Hope. This draws attention to the anticipation of the coming of a Messiah that weaves its way through Old Testaments history. As God's people were abused by power hungry kings and led astray by self-proclaimed prophets there arose a longing among those who believed, to have a new king who could show them how to be God's people. They yearned for a return of God's dynamic presence in their midst

The remaining three outer candles, of Advent wreath, represent Peace, Joy, and Love. The candle for the Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally Pink or Rose, and symbolizes Joy at the Advent of the Christ. The center candle is white and is called the Christ Candle. It is traditionally lit on Christmas Eve or Day. However, since many Protestant churches do not have services on those days, many light it on the Sunday preceding Christmas, with all five candles continuing to be lit in services through Epiphany (Jan 6). The central location of the Christ Candle reminds us that Jesus is the heart of the season, giving light to the world.

Advent, like many Christian holidays, can be observed in the home as well as church. With its association to Christmas day and Epiphany, Advent is a natural time to involve children in activities at home that directly connect with worship at church. At home the Advent Wreath can be a valuable icon for teaching your family about the First and Second Coming of Christ along with all of the other aspects of this season.

Position the Advent Wreath in a central location and encourage involvement from each member of the family. Place responsibilities on your younger children; from assigning them a candle to reading scriptures. Older children and adults can have research assignments to bring scriptures and events of the season together to be shared with the family as a whole. Set aside this special time, in the morning or evening; when the family will come together and light the appropriate candle, read scriptures, and share about the good news of Jesus. There are many other ideas you can use to decorate or profess your faith.



Example of Week 1 of Advent

Christmas

The Day of Jesus Christ birth is a joyous occasion, one that should be the focus on Him and what His life represents. Rather than allowing the focus in our families to be that of the gifts we receive, turn the focus on the gift on Christ and what we can give to others. Instead of watching our children sit in dismay because they did not receive the toy they wanted, help them to see the children who, if they receive a warm meal that day, feel that they have been truly blessed. Christmas or the birth of Christ should not focus on material gifts, but rather the gift that our Heavenly Father so graciously gave to the world. Take some time on this day to gather the family together and share about Jesus. Read about the events which lead up to His birth, the day of His birth, and the days to follow. Then make it a practice to learn a little about His life each day. Find somewhere your family can go to share Jesus with other. Go to a care center, homeless shelter, food kitchen, or maybe an orphanage and share Jesus and the Love He has for you and for everyone.



I have been asked why I have worship services on Christmas day; I should be home with my family opening gifts. I merely ask them, how they can be at home on this day when it is about Jesus and we should be out sharing the good news with others. I long for the day that all churches will be open on Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus and Praising His name. To me this is what it is all about.

Also during this time of reflection, take some time to look at the birth of Christ from the many different angles or aspects. We have the main perspective from God's word; however, take some time and imagine the joy of the angels who were present from the conception to the birth and what excitement they must have had, from the view of the shepherds who had possibly heard that this would come about, but had no idea it was happening now, to the wise men who traveled so far, first with one agenda, then coming to the realization that this was Jesus, King of Kings and

Lord of Lords. These are the things we can do to encourage a constant spiritual growth within ourselves and our family.

12 Days of Christmas/Epiphany

The 12 Days of Christmas begin on Christmas day and continue for 12 days until Epiphany eve or January 5th. (**January 6th** is known as **Epiphany**) It goes by other names in various church traditions. Epiphany is the highlight of the Christmas Season because it celebrates the day when Jesus was proclaimed, or introduced to the world, as King of Kings. Most remember the story of Jesus' birth, and the three wise men who journeyed to see this baby lying in a manger. What they fail to think about is that it took some time for the wise men to make their way to Bethlehem to see Jesus. It actually took 12 days for them to make the journey, thus we have the 12 days of Christmas which are celebrated in the final day of Epiphany (sometimes referred to as Three Kings Day or Christmastide), a term which means "to reveal" or "to make know". And this is exactly what happened; the Three Kings introduced Jesus to the world by proclaiming Him King of Kings. (Until this time the news of the birth of our Savior was not known throughout the world) Another important aspect of the day of Epiphany is that it marks the first day our Lord and Savior Jesus is worshiped. These kings got down on their knees praising Jesus Christ; **When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.** (Matt 2:10-12)

Ash Wednesday/Lent

Ash Wednesday marks the start of the Lent season and occurs the seventh Wednesday before Easter. It was given the name based on the tradition of placing ashes on worshipper's foreheads as a symbol of the darkness or loss that sin brings into the world. It not only signifies the mourning of the death of Jesus but helps Christians to realize the consequences for their sins. The ashes are generally from burnt palm branches used on the Palm Sunday of the previous year and are placed on the foreheads in the shape of the cross. Lent is the period of time from Ash Weds to Easter, which also includes Holy Week. When we think of Lent, the word love is not the first thing that comes to mind. But without love there would not be a season of Lent. For it was the Love of God that brought us His Son Jesus Christ and it was the Love of Christ that bought us salvation. With that in mind, let's look at one of the first and greatest examples of love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) Think about this, God loved us so much that He sent His Son knowing that He was to be crucified to cleanse us of our sins. This is one of the most remarkable examples of love in its truest form. If we could comprehend but the smallest fraction of this love, we would be forever blessed.

So as we enjoy this season of Lent, and remember it is a time to reflect. Take this time to give up the bitterness, anger, and hatred you may have towards your neighbors or those who have done you wrong and turn that energy into Love. Show everyone you meet, the Love of Christ. Let them experience what it truly means to be a Christian. Let them know what the death and resurrection of Christ really stands for.



Holy Week

Holy week begins with Palm Sunday, then moves through the week to Maundy Thursday, and reaches its peak on Good Friday. It is one of my most favorite times of the year. In fact I wish we celebrated Advent for six months then Lent for the other six months, keep ourselves in a high state of spiritual awareness and celebration.

Palm Sunday

When you look at the events from Palm Sunday to Good Friday it's almost like one of those "Good news - Bad news" stories. The good news was that the Word of God was reaching more and more people and they were seeing Jesus as the true Son of God. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the Donkey, the scene was that of a large crowd, waving palm branches, chanting and singing to their new King. You can almost imagine it was like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the crowds and celebration. The bad news, these same people turned on Him and their chants went from praises to scorns.

When Jesus came to the City of Jerusalem He was at the peak of public approval. More and more people were beginning to follow Him and His Disciples. In fact, in modern day terms one would say He was riding the wave and was unstoppable. But Jesus knew there was more to come than this. In Luke 19:42-44 Jesus said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

As Jesus entered the city He was warmly welcomed by the crowd. I think this is also another underlying problem Jesus was talking of. The crowd was excited that He was coming but their expectation as to why He was coming was not the reason for His visit. This is one reason that they later turned on Him. This shows us the importance of not placing our expectation or limitation on Christ, for when we do we will miss that greatness of what He has for each of us. When we set limits, we are in essence putting up walls and not inviting Christ inside. So don't be like those who welcomed Christ so warmly, then turn against Him when they did not receive what they wanted, for when we do we are joining along side them as they later yell – "Crucify Him".

Maundy Thursday - Passover

Many events occurred on this day, the day before the crucifixion of Jesus. We have many opportunities to see who Jesus truly is and what He desires for each of us to do with our lives. From the foot washing, to the betrayal, to the gift of communion, this day is packed with so many vital teachings and examples for all mankind

This is a time many churches get together and share and communion with one another and some even reenact the last supper with church members playing the different roles of the disciples. These are also roles you can take on at home to include the most humbling event for many to participating in, the foot washing.

Good Friday

On this day through Saturday, the colors are that of black, for it was a dark day for mankind to have participated in the crucifixion of Jesus. For Christians, though this day is one of mourning, it is also a day that we can come to grasp with the realization of the price Jesus paid for our sins. Though it is the true begin of what the joy of being a Christian is all about (the new covenant with God, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life to mention a few), it is a day to reflect on our own sins. Many churches take this day, nail their sins to the cross, then take those sins off and burn them; symbolizing the fact that through the Cross of Jesus, we have forgiveness. This is also something you can do at home, with or without the nailing, write down the sins, keep them confidential, then burn the sin as you quietly ask God for forgiveness and allow the burdens you carry to be lifted.



The best way to understand this day is to take a walk on the path that Jesus took for each of us. Think about all of His teachings and what His life stood for. Picture the Cross, the Nails, and the Crown that our King chose to wear, not one of gold but of thorns so sharp, to touch them without breaking the skin is impossible. Then focus on why Christ followed this path, one set before Him even before He came as man. See past the physical picture of this event to what God wants us to understand and share from it. See the significance of Forgiveness, of the new covenants God made with man, and how these events affect our daily lives.

Easter

The pinnacle of the Crucifixion of Jesus is here. Christ has risen from the dead. We know this is true because:

1. First He was publicly executed. This also showed He was a man and can truly represent us in heaven.
2. The grave site was secured by higher officials.
3. In spite of the guards the grave was empty.

4. Many saw him alive
5. His apostles were dramatically changed after seeing him
6. Witnesses were willing to die for their claims
7. Jewish believers changed their day of worship
8. This was the fulfillment of prophecy

This is such a great day for Christians, a day that finally puts all of the pieces together and locks the truth of God's Word in our hearts forever. For those who had doubts along the way have now had their lives changed forever, when they saw or heard the news that Jesus was raised from the dead. Though Easter was not immediately a celebrated day, by the fourth century (321 AD) it became a traditional day of worship and celebration, set on the first full moon after the spring equinox. (The day when the sun's ecliptic or apparent path in the sky crosses the equator, thus making days and nights of equal length. This usually occurs on March 21, which means the date of Easter can range between March 22 and April 25 depending on the lunar cycle.)

Easter, like many Christian holidays or celebrations, has had its true meaning shadowed by what the world, or Satan, has turned it into. Far too many people, Christians alike, have attached this greatest of days to that of egg hunts and Easter bunnies. In fact Easter, which should be the most spectacular holiday for Christians, is the fourth largest holiday, falling far below the day of Halloween. What does it say when a day of Satan is more recognized than the day we celebrate Eternal Life and Forgiveness of Sins through the Risen Christ! We need to bring Jesus back as the focus of our lives everyday. We can not allow ourselves or others to fall to the desires of the world and draw any of the focus away from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Pentecost

In many churches, the season of Pentecost is one of the most neglected of the church calendar. This day of celebration is one that allows us to focus on the Gift of the Holy Spirit along with the existence of the Holy Trinity. The sanctuary color for Pentecost is Red. The red symbolizes both, the fire of Pentecost as well as the apostles and early followers of Jesus who were gathered in the Upper Room for the empowerment from God to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. For Christians, Pentecost Sunday is a day to celebrate hope, a hope called forth by the knowledge that God through His Holy Spirit is at work among His people. It is a celebration of newness, of recreation, of renewal of purpose, mission, and calling as God's people. It is a celebration of God's ongoing work in the world. Yet, it is also a recognition that His work is done through His people as He pours out His presence upon them.

This focus on the church's mission to the world, and the enabling presence of God through the work of the Holy Spirit in the church to empower that mission, should provide a powerful motivation for churches, especially those in the evangelical traditions, to recover this season of the church year. There is tremendous opportunity to use this sacred time to call people to renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Remember that the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. He is here to guide us and to help us interpret and understand God's will for us.

All Saints Day

This day is not one that is widely known about or celebrated; however, its origin is one that is critical to Christians today. Also it is not the day that is as important as why it was introduced and what it is meant to accomplish. All Saints day falls on Nov 1, and it does not take much calculation to figure out the day that falls before this one, Oct 31.

Most Christians today feel that Halloween is an acceptable holiday to participate in and that it hurts no one. This is farthest from the truth and all Christians should take some time to become aware of what they are supporting, regardless of the fact they feel they are not contributing to the root of its meaning.

So you think that Halloween is OK to participate in?

It is a satanic night that must be avoided. **Deuteronomy 18:10-12** says, "**Let no one be found among you who ... practices divination**" (such as fortune telling or using tarot cards), or **sorcery (dabbling in voodoo or charms)** "or **interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium, or spiritist, or who consults the dead**" (this would include someone who tries to contact demons).

The origins of Halloween, or "Samhain" in the Celtic religion, are well known. On the night of Samhain, the Celts believed that the barrier between the physical world and the spiritual world was at its weakest; and spirits, as well as souls of the dead, were free to roam the earth. A sect of male and female priests known as the Druids, celebrated by staging a fertility festival to thank the spirits (demons) for the crops of that year. During the night, the Druids held black masses. **Colossians 2:8** reads, "**See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the traditions of men, or according to the elementary principles of the world rather than according to Christ.**"

The custom of using leaves, pumpkins and cornstalks as Halloween decorations comes from this Druidic festival. Understanding the pagan origins of Halloween, Christians should ask themselves whether witches, goblins, ghosts, and other Halloween decorations should be displayed in front of their homes. If you're a Christian, any decision you make should be in harmony with what the Bible teaches. And by examining scripture, we can get a clear view of what a Christian's attitude should be toward playing around with the occult and fortunetelling. **Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. (Deut 18:10-13)**

We live in a world that feeds on the negative or the things that are not of Jesus. And when they see Christians participating in these things, it fuels them even more. Arizona has one of the largest groups of wicca and satan worshippers in the country, who use this night for their magical powers because they feel they will be at there peak. This is also a night in which satanic worshippers gather and make sacrifices to satan. It is a documented fact that women in these groups will get

pregnant nine months before this night, for the purpose of having a newborn child to sacrifice to satan. So as you are walking your children around, dressed as witches and ghost, a baby is being sacrificed to satan; and many still insist this is an innocent holiday. **He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."** (Rev 21:7-8)

Thus All Saints day was developed by the Catholic Church to give Christian a day to focus on other than Halloween. This does not mean we take this day and worship the saints, because we know this is wrong, God tells us to pray for the saints and nothing else; but it is a day we can look at the teachings of some of the saints or just take the day to focus strictly on Jesus. You can also find many churches that will have block parties on Halloween night and even encourage children to dress up as biblical characters, so that they do not feel left out, all with the purpose of drawing the attention away from satan. So what ever you do, whether you focus on All Saints day or participate in church functions, please take the time and pray for those who still see this as a holiday which is innocent and hurts no one. And never forget that satan can appear as an angel of light, he can and will do anything to deceive us from the truth.

Thanksgiving

I know that listing this as a church Holiday as brought some a bit of confusion, but this is a holiday, as most, which has lost its true meaning.

The proclamation for the day of thanks was made by President George Washington, when he signed an Abstract on October 3, 1789 setting aside Thursday, November 26, 1789 as a day of **"Public Thanksgiving and Prayer" -a time "to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God."** By 1817 New York State had adopted Thanksgiving as an annual holiday. However, it was not until October 3, 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, that an official national Thanksgiving holiday was established by President Abraham Lincoln. No one in their right mind would thank God for the Civil War, but Lincoln knew in the midst of the war, that the nation would only survive if it looked beyond the immediate situation and **found its strength in God**. So he called a nation divided to be in **prayer**. In fact the driving force behind President Lincoln setting this day aside, was the petitions of a woman who wanted a day set aside that we can give thanks to God for all that He has given us throughout the year. The holiday was later tied to the day of thanks given by the pilgrims, which drew the focus from the true meaning.

So if we work together, we can put that focus back on to God where it was meant to be from the start. Let us give thanks to God every day, but build this day as a time when we come together with family and friends, giving thanks to God for all we have received.

All the Praise and Glory to the Father and the Son

Pastor Scott