

For many centuries, the Christian Church has worshiped the Lord Jesus following a calendar called the church year. It's different from the calendar year. It doesn't go from January through December; it goes from Advent through the Trinity or Pentecost season. This church year walks us through the entire life of Christ, so that in twelve months' time we can review the most important things Jesus Christ said and did.

ADVENT

The Church Year begins with the season of Advent, which usually comes right after Thanksgiving. Advent is a word that means "to come." In Advent we think about Christ's coming. The first window in our sanctuary is the Advent window. You can see the cross within the scroll of the Old Testament, because that's where the prophecies about Jesus were recorded. You can see the star of David, because Jesus is a descendant of David. And you can see the four Advent candles, that prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming. In Advent we get ready for Jesus to come: first as our Savior born in Bethlehem, then someday as our judge on Judgment Day. Jesus is coming soon, and in Advent Micah prepares us for his coming:

Micah 5:2-4

² "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

³ Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. ⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel, CW 23:1,2

CHRISTMAS

I would hardly describe the first Christmas Eve as a silent night. Bethlehem is bustling with travelers and is so packed that Mary and Joseph can't even find a decent place to stay. Loud, smelly livestock are in the same room Jesus is born. A choir of angels is singing out in the fields. Shepherds barge in in the middle of the night, and then go running and shouting through the city streets, sharing the good news. Hardly a silent night, but certainly a holy night. Christ the Savior is born!

The second window in our church is the Christmas window. You can see the manger and the hay where Mary placed the holy child; there Jesus slept in heavenly peace. You can see a golden crown, because Jesus is the king of heaven and earth. But at Christmas that heavenly king took on human flesh and became human and became Emmanuel, which means God with us. At Christmas, Jesus came to be with us.

Luke 2:1-20

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Silent Night, Holy Night, CW 60

EPIPHANY

The season of Epiphany is the season of light. The Magi followed the light of the star that led them to the home of Jesus. And throughout the season of Epiphany Jesus reveals himself as the light of the world, the Savior of the human race.

In the third window, the Epiphany star shines brightly and points in four directions, because the light of the Gospel goes out to the four corners of the earth. It also takes the form of a cross, the symbol of our salvation. You can see the little town of Bethlehem and the three crowns, representing the Magi and the three gifts they brought to Jesus. They were Gentiles, and they believed in the Jewish Savior, just like we are Gentiles, and we believe in the Jewish Savior, Jesus Christ. And so the light of Christ's epiphany continues to shine in our hearts by faith.

Matthew 2:1-2, 9b-11

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

And the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.¹¹ 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, frankincense and myrrh.

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise, CW 82:1,5

LENT

Take a close look at the fourth window, and what do you see? You see pain: a cross stained red with blood; two scourges, instruments of torture; a rooster that cries out the betrayal of a close friend. There is pain in this window. There is also love. The Sacrament of Holy Communion, which Jesus instituted just hours before dying (Do you see the bread and the cup?) is a gift of love.

The season of Lent is a season of pain, and a season of love. We see Jesus suffer the greatest possible pain in Lent. And we feel the pain and guilt of our own sins. But we also see the love of Christ that drove him to the cross for us. And that fills our hearts with love.

When we come to the season of Lent, we need to remember: for us, Lent is all about love for Jesus; but for Jesus, Lent is all about love for us. Wondrous love.

John 13:1 & 15:9-17

¹ *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

⁹ *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command.¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.¹⁶ You did not choose me,*

but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.”

What Wondrous Love is This, CW 120:1,3,4

EASTER

“I know that my Redeemer lives! I saw him with my own eyes, and he called me by my name!” That’s probably what Mary Magdalene said when she saw the disciples and told them that she had seen Jesus, risen from the dead. Easter is the happiest time of all, the pinnacle of the church year, because the resurrection of Jesus Christ means Jesus wins, and Satan loses, and our sins are forgiven, and heaven in our home.

The Easter window is over here, and we see Jesus as the Lamb of God, alive forever and ever. He is the Alpha and the Omega (Do you see those two Greek letters above the Lamb’s head?) – that means he is the beginning and the end. And there’s that beautiful Easter lily, that stays in bloom in our window all year long, to remind everyone who worships Jesus in this sanctuary that our Redeemer lives.

John 20:11-16

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

I Know that My Redeemer Lives, CW 152:1,2,7,8

ASCENSION

The Festival of Ascension, depicted in the sixth window, is not so much a “Goodbye,” as it is a “See you later.” Jesus didn’t say goodbye to us and leave us forever. He ascended into heaven to rule over this world and to prepare a place for us in heaven. But he’s coming back, in the same way we saw him go. So at Ascension Jesus says, “I’ll see you later.” We don’t know how much later. Christians live with an eye to the sky, knowing Christ could come back at any time. But as we look at this window and see Christ ascend through the white clouds into the heavens, the hymn of glory we sing is Alleluia!

Acts 1:6-11

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing, CW 171:1,4

PENTECOST

Pentecost comes next in the church year; that's the day the Holy Spirit came in power and blessed the church. Remember the tongues of fire that rested on the disciples' heads? Remember how they could speak in different languages, how they shared the Gospel with people from other nations? Remember how many people were baptized that day? Pentecost is the day of the Holy Spirit.

Now look at the Pentecost window. See the tongues of fire? Fire is a symbol of faith, and the Holy Spirit keeps that fire burning. See the seashell? That's a symbol for baptism. And some of you have maybe seen this before, but we pastors often use this silver seashell to baptize people right here in this church. Baptism lights the fire of faith, and it's all the work of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1-4, 14a, 38-41

¹ *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.* ² *Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.* ³ *They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.* ⁴ *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

¹⁴ *Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.*

³⁸ *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* ³⁹ *The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."* ⁴⁰ *With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."* ⁴¹ *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

Holy Spirit, Light Divine, CW 183:1-4

TRINITY

Trinity Sunday always comes after Pentecost Sunday. Trinity Sunday is the day we marvel again at the mind-blowing mystery that our loving God exists as three distinct persons in one holy God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And in the Trinity window, you can see the hand of God the Father, the cross of Jesus, God's Son, and white dove (because the Holy Spirit took the form of a dove when Jesus was baptized). You can also see a triangle, which is a Christian symbol for the Trinity, since a triangle is one shape with three sides, kind of like how the Lord is one God in three persons.

During the summer, our services are called Sundays after Pentecost; years ago they used to be called Sundays after Trinity. Basically, this period of time in the church year, during the summer months, is the time when we review the parables and the teachings of Jesus. For the last few years we've even had summer sermon series on Luther's Catechism. This is the time of the church year for us to be students, and for Jesus to be our teacher.

And that lasts all the way until Christ the King Sunday, which is the last Sunday of the church year and usually comes right before Thanksgiving. And then we start over, and we go all the way back to Advent.

The seasons of the church year may change. But what doesn't change, what will never change, is God's love for us in Christ Jesus. Each of these seasons, each of these windows, proclaim Christ. To him be honor and praise forever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 6:1-4

¹ *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.* ² *Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.* ³ *And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."* ⁴ *At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, CW 195:1,2