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Brief History of the Liturgical Year

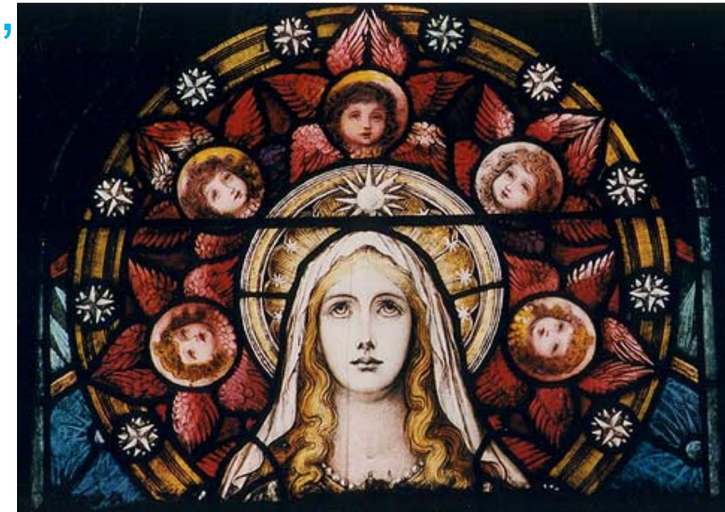
- The Church calendar has always revolved the celebration of Easter and the mystery of the Redemption (Jesus suffered, died, rose from the dead). Easter was the only feast celebrated for the first three hundred years. The feast of Christmas was recorded as initially being celebrated in 335-336 AD. Over the centuries, the Church developed many special festival days to praise and worship God and celebrate his loving intervention in human history. In the early centuries, local church communities also remembered those who heroically witnessed to their faith, especially the martyrs. Thus, the powerful example of the martyrs was elevated before the eyes of all the faithful, and their courageous testimony was remembered. Pope Pius V compiled a universal Church calendar in 1568, which was based on local church calendars. It was not until 1589 that the term “Church year” was first used. By 1955, the feast days of 338 saints were highlighted by the calendar.

Liturgical Year

- The liturgical year begins with **Advent**, which starts four Sundays before Christmas (December 25). It is four weeks of preparation before the celebration of Jesus' birth. The mood of this season is anticipation and preparation, with an underlying thread of penitence, awaiting the coming of the Savior.
- Liturgical color: violet for royalty, humility and hope

Immaculate Conception of Mary

- Holy day of obligation. The observance of this feast began with a Papal encyclical by Pope Pius IX, when he formally defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, *INEFFABILIS DEUS*, on December 8, 1854. Several years later, in 1858, the Blessed Mother gave her name to St. Bernadette at Lourdes stating, "I am the Immaculate Conception."



Christmas Season

- **Christmas - December 25th**
 - Christmas is the season when Catholics and other Christian Churches give thanks to God the Father for the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. This Season lasts 12 days, beginning on Christmas Eve (December 24th) and continues to the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6th).
 - Liturgical color: white for light, innocence, and joy

- Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
 - January 1st
 - The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God is a feast day of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The feast is a celebration of Mary's motherhood of Jesus.
- Epiphany - January 6th
 - Epiphany celebrates the revelation of God the Son as a human being in Jesus Christ. The feast commemorates the visit of the Magi to the Christ child, and thus Jesus' physical manifestation to the Gentiles.

- **Baptism of the Lord**

- The Baptism of the Lord commemorates the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The feast marks the end of the liturgical season of Christmas. On the following day the season of ordinary time begins.

Ordinary Time

- Ordinary Time begins with the Monday that immediately follows the Baptism of the Lord. It ends on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. During this part of the Liturgical Calendar, all the Sundays are numbered consecutively. During this time frame, the Liturgy of the Word is devoted to the mysteries surrounding the life of Christ. Ordinary Time is the liturgical period outside of the other liturgical seasons, and runs 33 or 34 weeks.
- Liturgical color: green for growth and eternal life

Lent

- **Lent** begins on Ash Wednesday (40 days before Easter), between Feb. 4 and Mar. 10). The ashes, made from burning the palms from the previous year, are smeared on the faithful as a reminder of mortality.
- Lent is a season of fasting and penitence. No meat can be eaten on Ash Wednesday or the Fridays in Lent.
- Liturgical color: violet for penitence: sorrow and repentance for one's sins.

Lent

- Lent culminates in Holy Week, which celebrates in great detail Christ's final days on earth.
- It begins with Palm Sunday and Christ's entry into Jerusalem, celebrated with the blessing and distribution of palms. These were kept in houses as a blessing for the rest of the year.
- On Maundy Thursday the Last Supper is celebrated.
- Good Friday, the most solemn day of the year, commemorated the crucifixion.
- The vigil on Holy Saturday was a rich liturgical celebration, with the blessing of the huge Pascal candle (destined to burn continuously for 40 days). At daybreak on Easter Sunday morning, the bells erupted with joy.

Easter Season

- **Eastertide** is the most joyous of Christian holidays, beginning with the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday (between Mar. 22 and April 25).
- The Easter season lasts 40 days until Ascension Thursday. The liturgy is full of Alleluias.
- During this time, Christ walked the earth to strengthen the faith of his apostles before returning to heaven once and for all.
- Liturgical color: White/gold – purity, glory, and joy

Easter Season

- **Pentecost** occurs 50 days after Easter and celebrates the descending of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and the beginning of the Christian Church. This holiday gift of the Holy Spirit as symbolizing the "priesthood of all believers."
- The **time after Pentecost** is the longest liturgical season, lasting from now until Advent. It is the "ordinary time"
- There are a number of holidays of interest that occur around this time. The Sunday after Pentecost is Trinity Sunday, and the Sunday after that is the Feast of Corpus Christi (the Blessed Sacrament).

Ordinary Time

- Assumption of the Virgin Mary, a major holy day, is celebrated on August 15.
- All Saints' Day (All Hallows' Day) on November 1
- The last Sunday in the Liturgical Year is the Feast of Christ the King. 34th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Holy Days of Obligation

- On December 13, 1991, the members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America made the following general decree concerning holy days of obligation for Latin Rite Catholics:
- In addition to Sunday, the days to be observed as holy days of obligation in the Latin Rite dioceses of the United States of America, in conformity with canon 1246, are as follows:
- January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter, the solemnity of the Ascension
August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
November 1, the solemnity of All Saints
December 8, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
December 25, the solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
- Whenever January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, or August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption, or November 1, the solemnity of All Saints, falls on a Saturday or on a Monday, the precept to attend Mass is abrogated.