

# INTRODUCTION

*When the right time had come, God sent his Son.... Galatians 4:4*  
*Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.... John 20:1*

When we think of time, we are accustomed to using the abbreviations BC (Before Christ) and AD (*Anno Domini*, In the year of our Lord). This makes a profound statement about how we view time. As Christians, we interpret the passing of time in relation to Christ, who was born in time and who lives and reigns as eternal and universal Lord. So the Christian calendar reminds us that we are not secularists; we understand history as the outworking of God's redeeming purposes in Christ.

## *The Calendar*

The Church of England has a liturgical calendar, which is set out at the very front of our service books. Sundays and Festivals are given names, which relate them to the Christian story. So, it's not simply that, for example, we keep Sundays in December; rather, we call them *Sundays of Advent*, or that we merely have Sundays in August; rather, we call them *Sundays after Trinity*. We relate time to our convictions about the Gospel.

## *Sunday*

Sunday is the essential Christian festival, because it is the Day of Resurrection, the Day of Light, when God first began creation and when Jesus began the new creation by rising from the dead. Christians started to observe Sunday as their distinctive day from the earliest days of the Church, and we still worship on Sundays today to witness to the Resurrection.

Hence, 'every Sunday is Easter', and so every Sunday is a feast, a celebration.

## The Shape of the Christian Year

The seasons of the **Christian Year** are:

- ⌚ **Advent** (the four weeks before Christmas, from Advent Sunday to Christmas Eve)
  - ⌚ **Christmas** (from Christmas Day to the Eve of Epiphany)
  - ⌚ **Epiphany** (from the Feast of the Epiphany, 6th January to Candlemas, 2nd February)
  - ⌚ **Lent**, including Passiontide (from Ash Wednesday to Easter Eve)
  - ⌚ **Easter** (From Easter Day until the Day of Pentecost or Whitsunday)
- ? What is your favourite season of the Christian Year and why?

The periods from 3rd February to Shrove Tuesday and from the Monday after the Day of Pentecost to the Eve of Advent Sunday are designated as **Ordinary Time**, meaning non-seasonal time, and the Sundays during these two periods are called *Sundays before Lent* and *Sundays after Trinity*.

In the autumn All Saints' Day (1st November) marks a transition in Ordinary Time, when the Sundays are called *Sundays before Advent*, and we explore such themes as the saints, remembrance, heaven, the end of all things and Christ's final victory.

As well as the annual cycle of Sundays and Special Holy Days (for example Ash Wednesday, Ascension Day and Trinity Sunday), there is also the Calendar of Saints.

## The Calendar of Saints

- ⌚ **All Saints' Day** is observed on November 1st (or the Sunday nearest)
- ⌚ **The Blessed Virgin Mary** is commemorated principally on 15th August
- ⌚ **Feasts of Apostles and Evangelists** are observed throughout the year
- ⌚ There are also **Lesser Festivals**, commemorating holy women and men.

## Popular Festivals

As well as explicitly Christian festivals, we should not forget Popular Festivals, some of which have Christian roots and associations - for example New Year, St Valentine's Day, Fathers' Day or Hallowe'en.

For many people the day known more often as 'Mothers' Day' than Mothering Sunday, is a secular celebration, while there may be strong memories of Harvest Festival from school days.

The Church can use this widely observed 'secular calendar' as an opportunity for engagement with those at present outside of the Church, through creative all-age worship or, for example, baptism services which draw on popular themes and make Christian connections.

## *Community Celebrations*

Worship may also be linked with local celebrations and commemorations. For some communities in Durham, the mining heritage will be foremost, or for communities by the sea, an annual Sea Sunday commemoration. Annual town galas or village fetes provide another possibility.

## Northern Saints

The rich Christian heritage of Northumbria provides other opportunities for celebration, perhaps on a Deanery basis:

Benedict Biscop	January 12
St Cuthbert	March 20, September 4
St Bede	May 25
St Oswald	August 5
St Aidan	August 31
St Hild	November 19 (or 17)

- ? What possibilities can you see in your church for popular or community celebrations? Where could you hold them?

## Liturgical Colours

While liturgical colours are not mandatory in the Church of England, many churches use them to give visual expression to the different moods and themes of the Calendar. The most widely used scheme is:

**White or Gold** - these colours of celebration are used for principal festivals such as Christmas and Easter.

**Red** - for Holy Week, for the great feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came in tongues of fire; for martyrs and in many churches for the four Sundays before Advent.

**Purple** - for the preparatory seasons of Advent and Lent (although some churches have 'Lenten array', using simple unbleached linen).

**Green** - for 'ordinary' non-seasonal time.

## Music

Music can play a crucial role in 'colouring' the different seasons. Over time we build up associations with



particular pieces of music heard predominantly, say, during Eastertide or on Advent Sunday. The clearest example is perhaps Christmas carols – to use the tune of 'Hark! the herald angels sing' with different words at another time of year would feel very strange to most people. In some seasons it might be appropriate to sing the same psalm each Sunday for several weeks, particularly if the psalms have dropped out of your congregational worship.

- ? Could we exploit music's ability to create atmosphere more fully, both in instrumental and sung repertoire, to give a more distinctive sense of penitence, waiting, celebration etc?
- ? Might some of our congregation meet to learn a few new hymns or songs (or a new Communion setting) for a particular season?

## Engaging with all ages

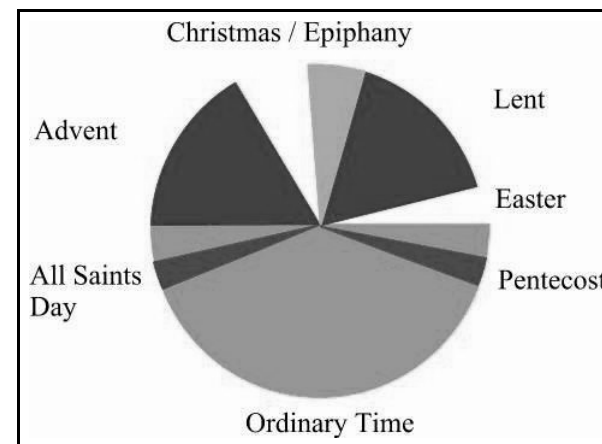
At some times of year we expect to have children or people who don't come to church very often, and we plan services accordingly.

But life isn't always tidy like that, and we need to be thinking about all ages (physical and spiritual) all the time. Each of these leaflets contains ideas or questions to help you to think about the all-age possibilities of the season.

### To think about

- ? Do we think of time in a Christian sense, or do we think about it in a secular way? How might the Christian Year help us?
- ? What are the distinctive moods and themes of the Christian Year? How can they help us to engage with the Christian story?

# The Christian Year



# An Introduction

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