

# THE CYCLE OF LIFE

# Observing the CHRISTIAN CALENDAR YEAR



*a time for contemplating  
our salvation*

LENT – Humbled in the turning  
THE PASCHAL TRIDUUM – Healed in the dying  
EASTER – Heartened in the rising

Deborah Haddix

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# About the Cycle of Life

(CONTEMPLATING SALVATION-GOD FOR US)

Lent (A Season of Darkness; Humbled in the Turning)

The Cycle of Life begins with the season of Lent which is a time to reckon with the reality of darkness and death. And while Lent is a season of darkness, for the Christian, it is not a season without hope. For this Cycle ends in Easter – in resurrection, in new life.

Lent is both a sojourn and a journey. The sojourn causes us to look inward and acknowledge our human and spiritual vulnerabilities. The journey bids us look outward and weigh the costs of discipleship. Both involve turning.

The forty days of Lent were meant to be a reminder of the forty days of rain during the flood, in which God purified the world; the forty years of wilderness wandering, in which God purified Israel; and the forty days of Jesus' fasting in the desert in preparation for his ministry.

One of the major observances of this season is the practice of fasting. Christian fasting is the voluntary denial of something for a specific period with a specific spiritual purpose. The act intentionally creates space for our relationship with God. It helps make room in our lives for us to listen to God, which often leads us to repentance. In fasting we address our temptations and deny ourselves of certain personal enjoyments. As well, we turn from a

self-centered stance to a position of grace-filled humility. God longs for those blank, empty places in our lives – not for the sake of emptiness, but so He can fill us with Himself.

The color of Lent is purple which symbolizes repentance.

## The Paschal Triduum (Healed in the Dying)

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday comprise The Paschal Triduum which begins at sundown on Thursday and ends at sundown on Sunday. The name comes from the Hebrew *pesach* or “Passover.”

Maundy Thursday commemorates the night on which Jesus first said, “Take, eat; this is my body.... Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant.... (Matthew 26:26-28), on the night He was handed over to suffering and death. The word Maundy is said to come from the Latin *mandatum (novum mandatum)* for the “new commandment: that Jesus gave His disciples on this night (John 13:34).

Good Friday is the second day of The Paschal Triduum. This name is thought to come from an earlier name for the day – “God’s Friday.” The day has been traditionally observed through a fast of the eyes and/or a fast of the ears.

Holy Saturday is also referred to as Silent Saturday, representing the silence of the tomb.

The color of The Paschal Triduum is black which symbolizes death and mourning.

## Easter (A Season of Joy; Heartened in the Rising)

Easter is the celebration of Christ's resurrection; the reason Christians gather for corporate worship on Sundays. It is a celebratory season full of joy.

As with Christmas, Easter is both a day and a season. Unknown to many, Easter is actually a fifty-day season. (It seems fitting, doesn't it, that Easter should last longer than Lent? That the feasting should exceed the fasting?)

During the season of Easter, we celebrate Christ risen, death defeated, sins forgiven, and evil overcome. Think about it. The reality of Easter is incredible; beyond our comprehension.

No wonder it needs a season. How could we possibly celebrate such an earth-shaking, mind-blowing, life-altering, cosmos-shattering event in a single day?

The color of Easter is white which symbolizes purity and joy. The white is often embellished with gold to indicate royalty and triumph.



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BUT GOD SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE  
WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.

Romans 5:8



## IDEAS FOR OBSERVING THE CYCLE OF LIFE

*This is a list of possible options for celebrating the days and seasons of the Cycle of Life. Whether you choose to celebrate this Cycle one time or several, make each year meaningful by selecting options that speak to you and your family. Directions and/or explanations can be found for many of these ideas by searching the internet.*

### LENT

A season of darkness; humbled in the turning. A time to reckon with the reality of darkness and death. We do so with hope, because this season of darkness ends in Easter, in resurrection, in new life. A time to prepare.

#### Ash Wednesday

- Fast – create space in your life for your relationship with God.
- Engage in prayerful reading and study of Scripture.
  - Read the Crucifixion account in each Gospel.
  - Read the same Crucifixion account in multiple versions of the Bible.
- Choose a thoughtful book to read during the season of Lent. Below are some suggestions:
  - *The Incomparable Christ*, J. Oswald Sanders
  - *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*, Nancy Guthrie
  - *The View from Mount Calvary: 24 Portraits of the Cross throughout Scripture*, John Phillips
  - *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper
  - *The Man Born to be King*, Dorothy L. Sayers
  - *Walk with Jesus*, Charles Swindoll

- For younger children, use Lenten Lights by Noel Piper for Lenten devotions.
- Repent - creating space in your lives to hear the voice of God speaking to your hearts.
- Practice charity. With money saved by fasting from something of choice, provide for a charitable organization or person or family in need.
- Refrain from having flowers in your home during the season of Lent.
- Set up a Lenten Cross. This cross contains seven purple candles, one for each of the Sundays of Lent and one for Maundy Thursday. Extinguish one candle each week entering ever more deeply into the darkness that will culminate in Christ's death. Light all candles each evening of the first week or one day that week. Extinguish one candle each week of Lent. The last candle should be extinguished on Maundy Thursday (usually the center one).
- Incorporate a visual or tangible symbol into your observance:
  - Carry a two-inch nail in your pocket during Lent.
  - Wear a cross around your neck, perhaps hidden beneath your clothing.
  - Place a cross in a noticeable spot within your home.
  - Fill your home with reproductions of art on the subject.
  - Place a palm branch through your door knocker or somewhere else in your home on Palm Sunday.

## THE PASCHAL TRIDUUM

We are healed in the dying. Make provision for spiritual engagement with God.

- Consider a no-fire fast during the triduum (a reminder that the Light has gone out of the world).

### Maundy Thursday

- Spend time alone each day reading, meditating, and praying.
- Engage in a Journey to the Cross or Way of the Cross, a series of stations representing particular moments in the Passion of Christ.

### Good Friday

- If possible, take the day off work.
- Meditate on the Seven Last Words. Or choose just one to meditate on throughout the day.

### Holy Saturday

- Keep it a quiet day.
- Read/explore the Apostle's Creed.
- Bake Empty Tomb (Resurrection) Cookies.





## EASTER

The celebration of Christ's resurrection. A season of joy.

### Easter Sunday

- Make it festive.
- Take a predawn walk. Watch the sun rise. Contemplate the amazing reality of resurrection and feel the incredible joy and wonder of Easter.
- Greet family, friends, and people at church with, "Christ is risen!" ("He is risen indeed!")
- On Easter Day and through the Easter season, go crazy with flowers in your home.
- Light a white candle during your Easter meal.
- Before church on Easter morning, read one of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection and maybe 1 Corinthians 15 or Romans 8.
- Play joyous music in your home on Easter morning.

### Easter Season

- Host a different group of friends for dinner each week during the season.
- Go to lunch with a group of fellow worshipers after church each Sunday of Easter.
- Possibly allow yourself some culinary treats that you normally limit in your diet.
- Ask Jesus to renew one part of your "self" over the weeks of Easter:
  - less doubt and more faith,
  - less procrastination and more discipline,
  - less irritability and more patience,
  - less lying and more honesty,
  - less indulgence and more generosity.

*Our hearts are transformed over time. God causes the growth (John 15:5).*

- Consider incorporating visual or tangible symbols into your observance:
  - Place a simple, painted wooden egg or other symbol in a place you will see each morning while dressing.
  - Designate a spot in your home for displaying small prints or photographs that represent the current season.
  - Place fresh flowers on a table through the season of new life.
  - Get outdoors into the resurgence of the spring landscape.

## THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Forty days after Easter, always celebrated on a Thursday.

- Take some time in retreat.
- Invite a small group of friends for dinner to celebrate the completion of Christ's work on our behalf.
- Meditate on the exaltation of Christ to glory.



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HE IS NOT HERE, FOR HE HAS RISEN, AS HE SAID.

COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE HE LAY.

Matthew 28:6



# PLANNING A CYCLE OF LIFE OBSERVANCE

## LENT

Ash Wednesday -

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Lenten Season (40 days) -

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# THE PASCHAL TRIDUUM

Maundy Thursday -

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Good Friday -

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Holy Saturday -

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# EASTER

Easter Sunday -

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Easter Season (50 days) -

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# THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Books:

*God Is on the Cross: Reflections on Lent and Easter* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* by J. I. Packer

*Lent for Everyone: Matthew, Year A: A Daily Devotional* by N. T. Wright

*Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God* by Bobby Gross

*Living the Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* by C.J. Mahaney

*Pierced for Our Transgressions* by Steve Jeffery

*Preparing for Easter: Fifty Devotional Readings* by C.S. Lewis

*The Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Resurrection* by Lee Strobel

*The Circle of Seasons: Meeting God in the Church Year* by Kimberlee Conway Ireton

### Pinterest Boards:

Lent & Holy Week Pinterest Board

Observing the Christian Calendar Pinterest Board

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