

Christian Calendar

November 20__ - November 20__

THE CYCLE OF LIGHT (CELEBRATING THE INCARNATION-GOD WITH US)

Advent – The season of thoughtful reflection and repentance. To spend the weeks before Christmas rethinking our priorities, realigning our lives with God’s desires for us, and seeking forgiveness and starting anew would go radically against our culture, but would serve to remind us that we are waiting for Christ.

*Inhabiting Advent – [1] give yourself **permission to sing** (Isaiah 65:17-25) and **permission to groan** (Romans 8:18-25), [2] **practice restraint** (skip mailing Christmas cards and send Easter greetings instead, rather than purchasing gifts make a charitable donation in your loved ones’ name, decline a holiday party or two, cut back on baking goods, eat fewer Christmas goodies), **practice retreat** (rather than continually being on the “Go,” spend some time to be alone, quiet and reflective. Sit for a time at the feet of Jesus, [3] **alert posture** (ask God to heighten your awareness of his presence, to open your eyes to what he is doing—in us and in the world), **open posture** (Mary is a model here, “I am wholly yours, I am fully open to your Word. I believe, let it be so with me.”)*

November _____ [Thanksgiving Day or anytime prior to the beginning of Advent]

- Choose recipient of Jesus’ gift from your family.
- Decide on amount (percentage of gift expenditures, coffee money, etc.).
- Be sure everyone has a shepherd’s pouch (or other container) for collecting money in.

Advent Begins

[The fourth Sunday before Christmas] – (Wait – The Hebrew word for wait is also the word for hope)

- Make or purchase an Advent Wreath.
- Light the first candle of the advent wreath on this evening. (Purple – repentance)
- Say a short prayer when lighting the candle.
- Read and meditate on Psalm 130:5-6 (NASB) –
I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait,
And in His word do I hope.
My soul *waits* for the Lord
More than the watchmen for the morning;
Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.
- Follow a schedule of daily Advent Readings.
- Incorporate a purchased or handmade Advent Calendar into your celebration.
- For younger children, use the Countdown to Jesus’ Birthday Advent Calendar.
- Make an Advent Paper Chain.
- Participate in an Advent service project individually, as a family or with friends.

[The third Sunday before Christmas] – (Prepare)

- Light an additional candle on this evening. (Purple- repentance)
- Read and meditate this week on Luke 1:76-79 (NASB) –
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;
To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation
By the forgiveness of their sins,
Because of the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,
To SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
To guide our feet into the way of peace.

December 6th – St. Nicholas Day

- Open stockings

[The second Sunday before Christmas] – (Rejoice)

- Light an additional candle on the Advent wreath. (Pink-joy)
- Read and mediate on Luke 1:46-49 (NASB)
And Mary said:
My soul exalts the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant;
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.
For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
And Holy is His name.
- Send an annual Christmas letter. (A way of reflecting on the past year. Joyfully notice the ways God has been present and faithful in your life and the way you have been able to be part of God's work in your corner of the world.)

[The Sunday before Christmas] – (Love)

- Light an additional candle on the Advent wreath. (Purple)
- John 3:16 (NASB)
For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

December 24th – Christmas Eve

- Light the Christ candle in the center of the Advent wreath. (white)
- Hold a special family worship time. All place their shepherd's pouches beside the manger of a special nativity scene. (Choose another time if all family is not able to be together now.)
- Hold a birthday celebration for Jesus on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Christmas – The Season of Celebration and Wonder. How better to embody the mystery of the incarnation than by celebrating the birth of the Word, the Light of the World, the Son of God, in the middle of the darkest time of year?

December 25th – Christmas Day (The Twelve Days of Christmas Begin)

- Light the white Christ candle in the center of your Advent wreath to mark the coming of the Light. Continue to light it each evening during Christmas.
- Purchase twelve ornaments, one for each day of Christmas. Each ornament could represent a name of Jesus and have a Scripture passage that corresponds to it. Every evening during Christmas, choose an ornament, hang it on the Advent wreath and read the Scripture.
- Invite someone who is alone or far from home to Christmas Dinner. Possibly on one of the twelve days of Christmas rather than Christmas Day.
- Keep tree and decorations up until the end of the season on January 6th.
- Send Christmas cards during the twelve days of Christmas.
- Celebrate with twelve days of Christmas gift giving—provide toys, school supplies, or personal care products for disadvantaged children.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen.
- Surprise your mail carrier, elderly neighbor, etc., with an inexpensive yet meaningful gift.

December 26th – Boxing Day (In honor of Stephen [Acts 6-8])

- Volunteer at a soup kitchen, food bank or homeless shelter.

January 1st – New Year's Day (coincides with the Feast of the Holy Name)

- Sometime during the day meditate on His name, sing praises to His name, speak it or reflect upon it.

January 5th – Eve of Epiphany

- Host a Twelfth Night party.

Epiphany – A celebration of the good news of the coming of God the Son for the whole earth. A season for seeing more of Christ's glory by focusing on his life and mission. (Come and See; John 1:39), and a season for making that glory better known to those around us. (Go and Tell; Luke 10:1-24). A time to both inhabit the Story and to tell the Story.

January 6th – Epiphany Begins

Consider: How do we as a family want to witness to the Light of the World during this season? How will the Light spread?

- A concrete reminder—Leave the porch light on or use electric candles in the windows.
- Take down Christmas tree and decorations providing an intentional ending to the Christmas season.

- Host a house blessing. Mark the lintel of the most used door in home “20 C+M+B ____ (last two digits of current calendar year → example 20 C+M+B 16 for the year 2016)” in chalk.
- Invite a few people to take a look at Jesus with you through a four to six week informal, investigative Bible study.
- Read an entire Gospel one or more times from start to finish, absorbing the full narrative sweep of Christ’s remarkable life.
- Read a book to sharpen your thinking about sharing your faith.
- Gather a few friends and serve together in a volunteer opportunity.
- Choose friends, coworkers, family members to pray for during Epiphany.
- If someone appears open, invite them for coffee and some conversation about spiritual matters.
- Give a friend a thoughtful book on the Christian faith.

The season of Epiphany ends the day before Ash Wednesday.

The final Sunday of Epiphany is also known as Transfiguration Sunday.

THE CYCLE OF LIFE (CONTEMPLATING SALVATION – GOD FOR US)

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. (Purple – repentance)

Lent is both a sojourn and a journey. The sojourn occurs in the desert as Jesus spends 40 days alone in self-reflection and discernment of God’s ways. The journey takes place on the road to Jerusalem as Jesus moves toward his dark destiny. 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 40 days of Lent were meant to be a reminder of the 40 days of rain during the flood, in which God purified the world; the 40 years of wilderness wandering, in which God purified Israel; and the 40 days of Jesus’ fasting in the desert in preparation for his ministry. Traditional Lenten observances include fasting, repentance and charity. Two core elements of Lenten practice, addressing our temptations and denying ourselves, help us turn from a self-centered stance to a grace-filled humility.

[Ash Wednesday is observed 40 days (not counting Sundays) prior to Easter] – Ash Wednesday

- Fast – create space in your life for your relationship with God.
- 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.
- Lenten Cross – containing 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. (Can be as simple as 7 votive or tea lights arranged in the shape of a cross.) 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 – healed in the dying. “Passover.” [Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday] Begins at sundown on Thursday and ends at sundown on Sunday. The 40 days of Lent prepare us for inhabiting the 3 days of Pascha. Sanctify the days. Make provision for spiritual engagement with God. (Black – death, mourning)

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

[The Thursday prior to Easter Sunday] - Maundy Thursday

[The night on which Jesus first said, “Take eat, this is my body... Drink this, all of you, this is my blood. The night Jesus was handed over to suffering and death. Maundy – probably from the Latin *mandatum* (*novum mandatum*), “new commandment” that Jesus gave his disciples on this night (John 13:34)]

- 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.

[The Friday before Easter Sunday] – Good Friday

[Possibly from an earlier phrase, “God’s Friday.” Fast of the eyes; fast of the ears.]

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

[The day before Easter Sunday] – Holy Saturday

[Also called Silent Saturday, representing the silence of the tomb.]

- Keep it a quiet day.
- Read/explore the Apostle's Creed.
- Bake Easter Cookies. (Directions available.)

Easter – A season of joy. The celebration of Christ's resurrection, the reason Christians worship on Sundays. The reality of Easter is Christ risen, death defeated, sins forgiven, evil overcome, no consequences. Easter is both a day and a season (50 days of Easter). It takes a season to celebrate an earth-shaking, mind-blowing, life-altering, cosmos-shattering event. (white – purity & joy, often embellished with gold – royalty & triumph)

[Easter always falls between March 22 and April 25] – Easter

- 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 I 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 is celebrated each year on the fortieth day after Easter. It is always celebrated on a Thursday.] – The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord

- 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.

THE CYCLES OF LOVE (CONCENTRATING ON THE OUTWORKING OF REDEMPTION – GOD THROUGH US)

Ordinary Time – A six months long season beginning with Pentecost (50th and final day of Easter) and ending with Reign of Christ Sunday (the Sunday before Advent). During Ordinary Time the Sundays are simply numbered and there are no major feasts. Over the months of Ordinary Time we can enter into additional rhythms of healthy discipleship: gathering for worship and dispersing for witness, tending to ourselves and caring for others, enjoying our rest and fulfilling our duties. As we pour ourselves out for God and others, God graciously pours himself into us.

[The fiftieth day of Easter] – Pentecost

The culmination of the Easter season and a time to celebrate the outpouring and indwelling of the third Person of the Trinity. Pentecost is generally celebrated for 8 days, from Sunday to Sunday. (red – reminder of the Holy Spirit's descent like "tongues, as of fire" on the gathered disciples)

- Wear red to church on Pentecost.
- Through the 8 days of Pentecost, light a red candle at your household meal each day.
- Locate a dove and set it out during the octave of Pentecost.

[Following Pentecost] – Ordinary Time

Christ works in us and through us by his Spirit to announce his gracious salvation and extend his righteous rule to the people of the world, all in expectation of his glorious return. (Luke 24 and Acts 1) (green)

Two simple disciplines help us live well in Ordinary Time: receiving the day and releasing the day. (1) Receiving the day – Our disposition each morning: gratefully accept the new day as a gift, acknowledge God's goodness, and invite his empowering presence. Commit to him our whole self and all our coming endeavors; then set about the day in joyful dependence. (2) Releasing the day – Our disposition at the end of each day: we go over our day, recalling those points when we sensed most clearly God's closeness and care and those when we felt most disconnected or disconcerted. We give thanks, then, for God's presence in those experiences and confess our sins and fallings. Finally, we let go of the day, leaving in God's hands any things we left undone and any that threaten to undo us. Both habits immerse us in grace.

Grateful for God's love, we love him in return. In awe of his holiness, we worship him. In response to his authority, we give our allegiance. As we live in the world in light of his rule, we look to him for provision and forgiveness and protection.

- Light a green candle during mealtime.
- Study the Holy Spirit.
- Breathe a breath prayer. Pay attention to where God might be present in that moment and be mindful of your desire to keep your eyes and heart turned toward Christ.
- Breathe a simple breath prayer each time you perform some routine activity such as washing your hands or getting in your car.
- Study the Trinity.
- Proclaim the Good News.

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