

The Liturgical Year

What is the Liturgical Year?

God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ provides the Church with a pattern for ordering worship in relationship to significant occasions in the life of and ministry Jesus. Each liturgical season has its own mood, scriptures and prayers, colors, themes for preaching, and even different traditions observed in the home. These seasons and their meaning are a very important part of our spiritual life at Third Church, and they enrich our faith through regular worship attendance during the entire liturgical year.

The liturgical year begins with Advent, from the Latin *adventus* ("arrival" or "coming"), the time of preparation for both the celebration of Jesus' birth, and his expected second coming at the end of time. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve, and this year the first Sunday of Advent falls on December 2, 2012. In many churches, including Third Church, this season is marked by the Advent Wreath, a garland of evergreens with four candles symbolizing hope, faith, joy, and love.

Following Advent the church observes the feasts and seasons of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost and Ordinary Time. This annual sequence becomes a yearly spiritual journey for us as we kneel at the manger, walk the streets of Jerusalem, stand beneath the cross, and witness the resurrection!

The Lectionary

The Talmud says that the practice of reading appointed Scriptures on given days or occasions dates back to the time of Moses. The lectionary, from the Latin *lectio* ("selection" or "reading") is an ordered set of scripture readings designated for use in worship. For every Sunday and Festival Day the lectionary includes a selection from the Old Testament, a Psalm, a selection from a New Testament epistle, and a reading from one of the Gospels. The readings are organized to accompany the liturgical year, and to allow for continuous readings of the books of the Bible from week to week.

The Revised Common Lectionary, used by Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans and some Baptists, is arranged in a three-year cycle. Year A prominently features the Gospel of Matthew and the letter to the Romans. Year B features the Gospel of Mark, along with 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and James. Year C features the Gospel of Luke, Colossians, Hebrews, and 1 and 2 Timothy. Readings from the Gospel of John are interspersed throughout the three-year cycle, especially during Christmas, Lent and Easter. We began Year C on the first Sunday of Advent, December 2, 2012.



The primary intent of the lectionary is to encourage a disciplined reading of the whole range of biblical witness in worship. The lectionary can also be an invaluable tool in the coordination of preaching, worship planning, liturgical art, music leadership and Christian education. Furthermore, the widespread use of the lectionary allows for ecumenical conversation about, and for personal reflection on, scripture.

Liturgical Colors

Liturgical colors draw us into the seasons of the church year and into the events in the life of Christ. These colors are used for vestments (ministers' stoles), antependia (pulpit hangings), banners and liturgical art, and help us engage our sense of sight in worship. White – the color of purity – symbolizes days and seasons of joy. Red – the color of fire – symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit. Purple – the color of royalty – designates the seasons of preparation and penitence. Green – a neutral color that symbolizes growth – is used during Ordinary Time, the parts of the year that fall outside the seasons of Lent through Easter and Advent through Christmas.

Our system of our liturgical colors is similar to the pattern used by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and several other Protestant denominations, and dates from the late 16th century. Prior to the standardization of the liturgy by Pope Pius V in 1570, the use of color in worship was limited to localized practices or completely avoided. Here is Third Church's pattern for the use of liturgical colors.

Purple	Advent
White	Christmas through Epiphany
Green	Ordinary Time (January 7 through Mardi Gras)
Purple	Ash Wednesday, Lent through Maundy Thursday
No Color	Good Friday
White	Easter Season
Red	Day of Pentecost
Green	Ordinary Time (Monday after Pentecost through Advent)
White	Trinity Sunday, All Saints Day, Christ the King Sunday

Third Presbyterian has a lovely collection of needlepoint antependia, thanks to the work of a dedicated group led by church member Jean Hardy. You can see and learn about our collection [here](#).

Why Do We Celebrate Christmas after December 25th?

The liturgical year begins at Advent, and we spend most of the month of December preparing for the Christmas season, which begins on December 24 when we light the Christ Candle and celebrate the birth of Jesus. In the commercial and retail world, Christmas usually ends a few days after December 25. However the liturgical Christmas season continues through Epiphany, January 6. We sing Christmas carols and use white stoles and paraments in worship for two weeks.

On Epiphany Sunday, the Sunday closest to January 6, we mark the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child and the manifestation to the world that Jesus is the Son of God. In addition, many

Christian traditions celebrate January 6 as the Baptism of the Lord, when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by his cousin John. Epiphany was first established as a Feast Day in AD 361, and was also celebrated as the Nativity of Christ. The Feast of Epiphany overshadowed Christmas until the Middle Ages, when December 25 became the day that is focused solely on Christ's birth in Bethlehem.

Here at Third Presbyterian Church our celebration of Christmas and Epiphany is extended a bit longer during the alternate years that we present the Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival. The festival originated in 14th century England when the serving of a boar's head at Yuletide, accompanied by carolers singing "in honor of the King of bliss," came to symbolize the triumph of the Christ Child over sin. The traditional festival includes the royal court with a king and queen, lords, ladies, knights, cooks, hunters, and woodsmen. Mary and Joseph, Baby Jesus, shepherds and wise men tell the story of the Nativity, which is embellished with music and carols, King Wenceslas and his pages, and the Yule Log. The Boar's Head Festival is an Epiphany gift from our congregation to the community, and brings the Christmas season to a joyous, festive close.

What is Lent and How Do We Observe It?

Lent is the forty day season of preparation before Easter that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at dusk on the day before Easter. The Sundays in this season are not counted as part of the forty days; like every Sunday of the year, they are weekly celebrations of the resurrection. The forty day period commemorates the forty days that Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness before beginning his public ministry. Before the Reformation, Lent was called Quadragesima, the Latin translation of the original Greek Tesseractostē ("fortieth day" before Easter). After the Reformation, as the vernacular was incorporated into worship, the word Lent was adopted from the German Lenz ("spring" when the days lengthen).

The days leading up to Lent are often celebrated as Carnival season, and culminate with Mardi Gras ("Fat Tuesday"). On Mardi Gras, it is traditional to eat the last of the rich or perishable foods in the house so that fasting or moderation can begin on Ash Wednesday. During Lent Christians prepare for Easter with repentance, reflection and spiritual discipline. While the practice of giving up something for Lent is very meaningful, some find that taking on something for Lent, such as volunteering or giving or praying more regularly, is also a beneficial spiritual experience.

Our worship is more introspective during Lent. The color purple designates a season of preparation and penitence. The music is meditative – Glorias and Alleluias are not sung from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday morning. The prayers are contemplative and the mood is quiet and thoughtful. In our worship and in our lives, Lent is the time to remember the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and to look forward to the joy of the resurrection.

Do you have a question about our worship at Third Presbyterian Church? Email jefisher100@gmail.com and we'll include it in an upcoming newsletter.