

PENTECOST

Green-the color is deeply imbued with the notions of growth and life. Green is the color associated with those weeks after the festival of Pentecost. This “ordinary” time, not punctuated by great festivals of the church year, is a season when that which seems mundane is recreated in an extraordinary way. It is a time when growth in discipleship is gradual, multifaceted, and integrating. Roots are set deep. Ordinarity in relationships can be transformed by the discovery of the meaning and depth they possess.

Quiet growth can empower the hesitant person or community to risk. On All Saints’ Day the church remembers the witnesses of the past, and their example gives new dimension to life. The events of daily experience are explored for their significance and challenge to discipleship. That which divides is identified and confronted with the opportunity for integration.

The common acts of living and relating are made holy. Common bread and common juice are transformed into the presence of the living Christ. A child is lifted by Jesus, giving holy significance to the little ones.

Advent

To dream of a world of peace and justice, where God’s goodness is all in all, and to wake to the realization, is a cherished human hope. The figure in Dali’s *Girl Standing at the Window* waits with full attention for something. She looks expectantly out into the wide world beyond her familiar harbor. Attentive, hope-filled, alert, with her whole being trained on the horizon, she watches for the sign: the break in the meeting of sea and sky, the cloud of smoke that heralds the messenger’s arrival. Fully attentive-eyes and ears and imagination- she is ready to recognize and greet a hope-filled future.

So the church waits the arrival of Jesus through Advent. Poised, we are alert to the signs of the times in nature, Scripture, newspaper, ready to greet wherever the Christ appears. The Promise comes in unexpected peace blossoming like a garden in winter, in the wake-up call of the unlikely prophet, in the sudden courage to risk bringing God’s future into being. In Mary’s risk to bring Jesus into the world. Advent’s color is deep blue, the color of the sky just before the first rays of sunrise wake the rooster to announce to the watchers the dawning of the new day.

Christmas

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth among those whom God favors!” Silent night, holy night. Finally, the Earth and the Transcendent meet. Waiting ends. And it happens where we least expect it. The story tells of a makeshift barn with manger. In a humble human family, in humble surroundings, in an out-of-the-way place, a child is born, like every other human, albeit in difficult surroundings. But that child, despite humble circumstances, will be adored. The church celebrates the birth of Jesus-the word of God- for twelve joyful days, wearing the white and gold of a festival. With worship, music, hospitality, life-giving, believers greet each other with the news of Jesus’ birth. The church’s hope at this time is embodied in traditions such as the Mexican custom of *Las Posadas*. As Christmas approaches, a procession of children and neighbors goes from house to house with some of their members dressed as Mary, Joseph, and the angel. They call out for hospitality at each home, but those within playfully make excuses and turn them away. The pilgrims persevere until the last house, when finally the doors are opened and they and the entire procession are invited in. Families and friends welcome the travelers with food, comfort, and celebration, hospitality not offered at the first Christmas.

Epiphany

Epiphany is the season of signs: It celebrates the manifestation to the world of God in Christ. Three foreign rulers travel far to see and ordinary Jewish baby; water becomes wine at Canaan; the heavens open and the Spirit descends over Jesus' ritual bath in the Jordan. This One, whom we recognize as one of us is God's own beloved.

Now the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany celebration is completed. Celebrated on the twelfth day of Christmas, January 6, Epiphany is the day when Christians celebrate the manifestation that Jesus is the messiah. The visit from the Magi, coming from far places and representing diverse peoples, serves to confirm this. The liturgical color for Epiphany is white. Green is the color of every other day of the season, except for Transfiguration Sunday, when the color returns to celebratory white.

Now the cycle is complete. The other side of the paradox, the Christian claim about Jesus, is manifested. In the mosaic from a Byzantine monastery near Athens, some of Jesus' disciples finally perceive who he really is their sudden awareness overwhelms them. For the man they have known, and with whom they have experienced so much, is transfigured. And they are transformed by their insight. Now, instead of the tiny child in the manger, the image suggests that Jesus is also the universal Savior, the incarnation of God.

Lent

The image of the Palm Sunday procession captures the imagination of the church in Lent. Jesus, who began his ministry by calling people to "follow me," now leads his followers into the heart of the world's suffering and struggle. Confronting the power of sin manifest in individuals and in society, Jesus Preaches freedom, healing, justice, and new life. To follow Jesus means to carry out his mission in our time: it requires humble self-knowledge and the willingness to change one's life. It requires, as well, confident courage to confront the world to change its sinful structures. "Follow me" extends to Jerusalem where Jesus is hailed as ruler, then on to Calvary where he faces death. Jesus promises no safety along the road; he promises only to provide those who follow him with "the Way, the truth, and the life"

Lent is a journey, for both the church and individuals, of intense self-examination, of penitence for alienation from God's and one's fellow creatures, and for preparation for restoration. The season is focused on a journey in which one realizes the complete gift of Jesus Christ for others.

It is a journey that requires facing the cross. As the season approaches its climax, it is remembered that Jesus was determined to complete his mission and that he suffered greatly.

Finally he gave himself in complete trust to God as he submitted to crucifixion. In the Crucifixion rests the basis for claiming that indeed he was what he taught. When Jesus prayed on the cross that God would forgive his executioners and those who betray him, he exhibited the complete union of himself with that central characteristic of God, unqualified love.

Palm Sunday

In medieval times, churches in the West began the ritual of Passion Saturday, the week before Palm Sunday. On this day, the story of the raising of Lazarus was read in anticipation of the coming arrival of Christ. Today, most churches combine Passion and Palm Sunday. On this day, the Palm Sunday observance is reduced the triumphant entry of Christ through the city of Jerusalem into an opening day of sorts and have made the sixth Sunday in Lent, a celebration of Christ's passion. The color used for Palm Sunday, up to Maundy Thursday, is red.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday was the day of the last meal between Jesus and his trusted disciples, along with the giving of a new commandment and the washing of the feet. The new commandment was that people should love each other as Christ loves them. The customary color for Maundy Thursday is white, in keeping with the joy of communion, though the red put in place on Palm Sunday is also appropriate.

Good Friday

Good Friday, in simple terms, was the day Jesus was crucified. On this day, many churches hold vigils and services to commemorate Jesus' betrayal. The separation of Good Friday and Easter events contributed to the emphasis on Christ's death in Holy Communion, instead of the focus being on the resurrection and ascension.

Easter

The walls of death are not strong enough to prevail against the power of God. Almost birdlike, this figure is breaking free of Earth's gravity, no longer under the sway of ordinary time and space. This is the power of resurrection. The somber, contemplative emphasis of Lent culminated in the deepening gloom after the crucifixion and the entombment of Jesus. Then so silently in came, Easter morning bathed in the soft light of dawn. Death could not contain him. Love incarnate is the victory, and the history is forever changed because of God's gift through the savior.

The liturgical color for the Easter season is celebratory white, and this mood permeates not only Easter Day but is part of the 50 days of Easter, culminating in the triumph of Pentecost. A quiet dawn issues into the great jubilation of Easter morning worship. The followers of Jesus do not initially recognize him. This reality finally became the startling realization of the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.