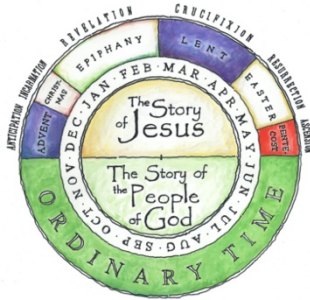


Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer

Marking the Seasons: The Church Calendar and the Liturgical Year

All the liturgical services of the church, such as baptism, Eucharist, and the Daily Office take place in the context of a larger structure called the church year. The church year is divided into seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost, with the rest of the weeks numbered sequentially in the Season after Pentecost.



There are two sections of the BCP that provide information about the church year. The Calendar of the Church Year, an outline of all the seasons and feasts of the church year, is found at pages 15-33. The liturgies for several of the main services are found in the section entitled Proper Liturgies for Special Days, found at pages 263-295.

How we measure time says something about how we think, what we value, and what we work toward and long for—what really matters to us. In the Christian life, we measure our time not by things we achieve or things we need to do. We measure time by what God has already done for us in the birth and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Our church year is oriented around two special days: Easter and Christmas. Most people know these are the two big holy days. But what many do not know is that we orient *all* our time in relation to them.

Our new year does not begin on January 1. The church's new year begins on the First Sunday of Advent, which is always four Sundays before Christmas Day. Thus, we are called to orient our days and our years around the birth of Jesus. The other critical date is Easter, the day of resurrection of Christ. Easter, as you know, does not fall on the same day each year. It is determined in an ancient fashion. [If you are curious, the BCP at pages 882-883 includes a table that lists the date of Easter for every year between 1900-2089]

Celebrating Christmas and Easter is only the beginning. The completeness of our faith is felt when we live into all the cycles and seasons of the church's calendar and discover the richness they hold. The church has seasons of the year, and like our secular seasons of winter, spring, summer and fall, each church season (the seven seasons mentioned in the first paragraph above) is distinct, helping us to focus our spiritual life. There are times for waiting and times for celebrating, times of darkness and times of light, times of pain and times of joy.

The changing seasons of the church year remind us that there is room for all of our experiences in the Christian journey.

While the seasons give us a general rhythm to our year, within each season there are several feasts and fasts intended to mark a particular event, person, or aspect of the Christian faith, all celebrating what we believe year after year. These days are marked out in order to learn more about our faith and ourselves. The special liturgies for the feast days and the

different seasons can awaken in us something new to our faith experience. We should take time to notice the differences in the liturgy each time we go to church.

That completes today's exploration. I hope you enjoyed our time together. Next time we will spend time focused on Holy Week and Easter. See you then.

In Christ, Deacon John

"Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer" by Vicki K. Black, Morehouse Publishing, 2005

"Walk in Love, Episcopal Beliefs & Practices" by Scott Gunn & Melody Wilson Shobe, Forward Movement, 2018

"Praying Shapes Believing, A Theological Commentary of the Book of Common Prayer" by Leonel L. Mitchell (updated by Ruth A. Meyers), Seabury Books, 2016