

Music at A&P

What is Lent?



As Western Christians who worship in a liturgically-oriented church, we live according to three interrelated calendars. One is the normal twelve-month Gregorian calendar that is second nature to all of us, another is the solar calendar that underlies much of our natural life, and the third is the church or liturgical calendar. How

do they align, and what does the liturgical calendar mean?

Advent is traditionally considered a penitential season, during which we prepare ourselves for the birth of the baby Jesus at Christmas. The Sundays highlight themes of God as Judge, John the Baptist, Mary and so forth. At Christmas we of course celebrate the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, and on Epiphany we celebrate the visit of the Magi to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. During the subsequent season of Epiphany we delight in Jesus' manifestation as a man who lived among us, the Light of the World. The culmination of the season is Transfiguration Sunday, when we remember Jesus' ascent of a mountain with three of his disciples, the appearance of Moses and Elijah alongside him, and Jesus' shining with divine radiance.

Lent is a solemn season of prayer, preparation and penance. It begins on Ash Wednesday, forty days prior to Easter (this year on February 17). The forty days mirror the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. The culmination of Lent is Holy Week, in which we commemorate the Passion, crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus.

Easter is the celebration of Jesus' rising from the dead, which symbolizes His eternal triumph over death and His perfect atonement for all of our sins.

On the Feast of the Ascension, we remember Jesus' miraculous ascension into heaven; on Pentecost, we celebrate the fulfilment of Jesus' promise to His disciples that he would send them "another Comforter", the Holy Spirit.

Trinity Sunday is a celebration of one of church doctrine's deepest mysteries, the existence of God as three persons in one: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Presbyterian tradition we formally acknowledge very few saints' days, but we do observe the feast of All Saints, which honours the example of the many faithful who have gone before us.

Christ the King (or "Reign of Christ") Sunday is the close of the church year, and celebrates Christ's divine and complete Lordship.

Our observance of the liturgical calendar is by no means a spiritual end in itself, nor does the calendar take precedence over scripture in our faith. Rather, it provides a structure for exploring our faith in a systematic and cyclical way that also associates specific facets of the faith with specific times of the year through its relationships to both the Gregorian and solar calendars.

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Key Dates		
Gregorian Calendar	Solar Calendar	Liturgical Calendar
Begins Jan. 1, and is divided into 12 months of 28 to 31 days' duration	March 20 (spring equinox - daylight vs. darkness of equal duration)	Begins on the First Sunday of Advent (four Sundays before Christmas Day)
	June 21 (summer solstice - most daylight)	Christmas Day (Dec. 25)
	September 23 (autumn equinox, when day vs. night are again equal)	Epiphany (begins Jan. 6)
	December 21 or 22 (winter solstice, when daylight is at its lowest ebb)	Lent (begins six Sundays before Easter)
		Easter (begins on the Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox)
		Ascension (40 days after Easter)
		Pentecost (50 days after Easter)
		Trinity Sunday (one week after Pentecost)
		All Saints (Nov. 1)
		Christ the King (Reign of Christ - the last Sunday before Advent I)