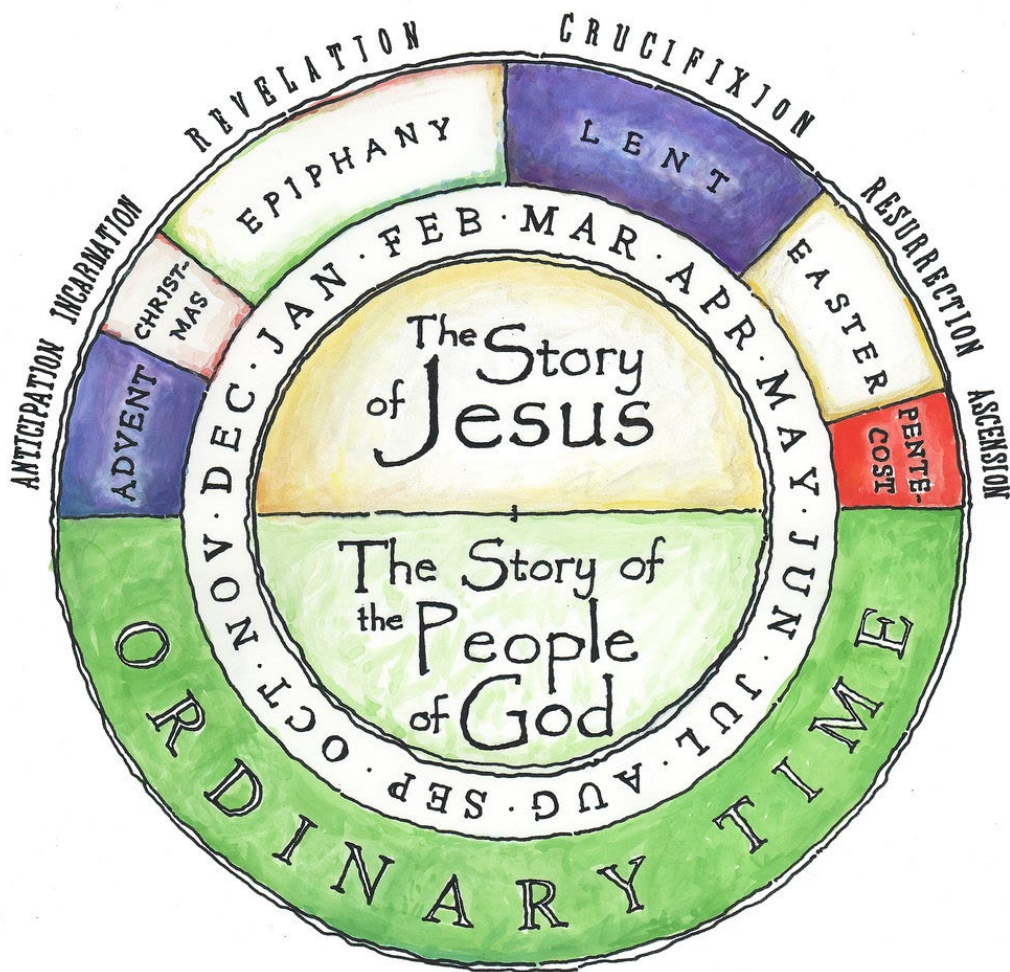


This is Our Story, This is Our Song

A Brief Exploration of The Worship of God
Throughout the Year at First Baptist Church



Rev. Zachary L. Bay
First Baptist Church
Middlesboro, Kentucky
Preface

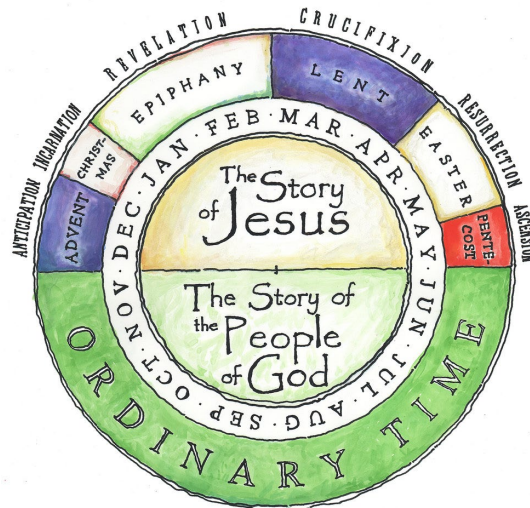
We have fifty-two Sundays a year. We have fifty-two hours any given year in which we are gathered together on a Sunday morning for “The Worship of God.” Other than a half-dozen other important services on other days (the Family Advent Service; the Service of Lessons, Carols, and Candlelight; Christmas Eve Come-and-Go Communion; Ash Wednesday; Maundy Thursday; and Good Friday), that’s it. That’s all the time we have in any given year to gather and worship God together as a praying, singing, listening, responding church of Jesus Christ.

I believe the time that a church spends in worship matters. From a quantitative standpoint, these hours are few but powerful. They are the time that we together practice the things that will nourish us in our faith, that we might then go forth and live them all the rest of our days. They are, in the words of the Apostle Paul, the way we “work out our faith in fear in trembling”—that is, with a healthy sense of awe and reverence. If you want to be a good violinist, pianist, or vocalist, you practice. If you want to be a good golfer or soccer player or track athlete, you practice. If you want to be good at your job—a good accountant, banker, teacher, or preacher—you practice. If you want to be a good spouse, parent, or friend, you practice. You practice according to the best techniques passed down through time and tweaked along the way by other practicing students. I believe that faith is no different. If you want to grow in faith, feel more deeply the presence of God in your life, and live in the way of grace and peace as Jesus taught—you practice for that, too. All the best research we have in the field of Christian Education suggests that faith cannot be learned by merely gathering and remembering information. Rather, faith is learned by disciplines and practices of formation. Like golf or piano or football, it’s not enough to know the proper technique in your mind—you have to practice it until you know it in your hand and feet and heart, too. Faith works that way, too. The time a church spends in worship is the time that it practices faith according to the best techniques passed down and tweaked along the way by other practicing students through the centuries.

We have fifty-two Sundays a year, and a half-dozen other services on other important days. I believe that these hours are holy. Holy, meaning “set apart.” Not only by us, but by Christians of various stripes down through the ages as their “best practices,” sifted and refined by centuries of work. Liturgy, a church word of Greek origin, means “the work of the people.” Herein is our liturgy at First Baptist Church. We stand as inheritors of the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, and with each passing year, we make the gift we’ve been given a little bit more our own. It’s how we do faith together.

Rev. Zachary L. Bay
Pastor
January 10, 2019

Advent
Four Sundays of Anticipation



It's New Year's! Well, sort of. Based on lunar cycles, the Chinese celebrate a new year each year in either January or February. In the West, following the Gregorian calendar, New Year's Day falls on January 1. In the church, a new year begins each First Sunday of Advent, when we begin again to tell the story of Jesus in our times or worship together.

The season of Advent ranges in length between 22 and 28 days. Whether 22 days, 28 days, or something between, Advent spans 4 Sundays. In virtually all Western churches—Catholic and Protestant alike—Advent begins on the Sunday nearest St. Andrew's Day, November 30. In the New Testament, Andrew is the brother of Simon Peter. After hearing John the Baptist speak of another who will come after him and “baptize with the Holy Spirit,” Andrew goes and says to his brother, “We have found the Messiah!” (John 1:41). Peter, of course, represents the church, and with the words of Andrew ringing in our ears, we begin Advent. We begin again a new year telling the “old, old story of Jesus and his love.”

As the image above shows, the color of the season is purple. During Advent, this color “dresses” the pulpit and the communion table (which symbolize the presence of Christ—his teaching and his Supper), and is matched by the stoles worn around the necks of the ministers (who symbolize Christ's disciples). In the Ancient Near East, purple was the color of royalty. The dye was produced by a labor-intensive process from the secretions of sea snails in the city of Tyre, and as a result, the purple dye was expensive. It came to be favored by rulers who could afford it, and who liked that the dye did not easily fade, even becoming brighter and more beautiful with wear. Tyrian purple, then, is the perfect color for a season anticipating the arrival of a King who will become increasingly brilliant and beautiful as he wears his life, death, and resurrection with amazing grace.

The central symbol of worship in Advent is the 5-candle Advent Wreath, which rests on the communion table and represents “The true light that shines on all people...coming into the world” (John 1:9). The Advent Wreath itself is full of evocative symbolism.

The magnolia leaves used in the Wreath are a local evergreen, and are collected and used as a symbol of eternal life that exists right here in our place in the world. Evergreen leaves withstand the death of winter, and in ancient cultures were a natural reminder in midwinter that summer would return and again bring warmth and growth. The circular shape of the green and the wreath itself, having no beginning or ending, is a further symbol of eternity.

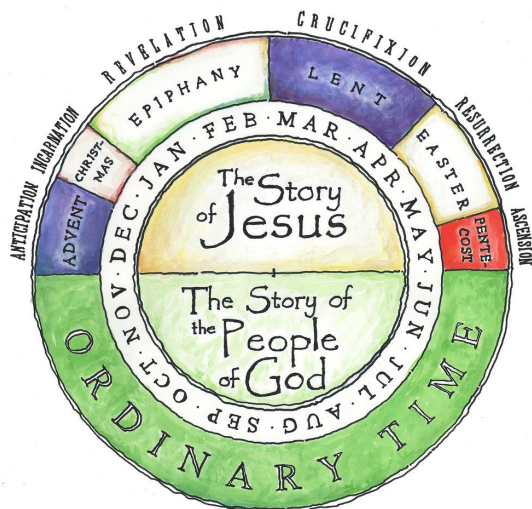
The candles of the Advent Wreath are a sign of the light shining in the darkness that cannot be overcome (John 1:5). With each successive Sunday in the season, a candle is lit and the light of the Wreath grows brighter as we near the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. On the First Sunday of Advent, church folks set light to the purple candle named Hope. On the Second Sunday, to the purple candle named Peace. On the Third Sunday of Advent, a family lights the rose colored candle in the Wreath. This Sunday, also called Gaudete Sunday, is a day of reprieve from Advent's prevailing theme of repentance and preparation—the church is over halfway through Advent, and the birth of Christ in Bethlehem draws nearer; Gaudete is Latin for “rejoice,” and the rose colored candle is named Joy. The third purple candle, and the fourth to be lit, is named Love. It symbolizes the nature and nearness of God, who “so loved the world he gave his only son” to it, and to us. On Christmas Eve night, in time for Christmas Eve Come-and-Go Communion, the deacons light the large, white candle in the center of the Advent Wreath. Its flame, burning brightly along with Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, is the sign that “The Word [has become] flesh and made his home among us” (John 1:14). Altogether, the five candles burn brightly and push back the darkness of the winter night and the darkness of a broken and aching world. As Luke's Christmas angel says it, “For unto you is born...a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord!” (2:11). Advent is a season of anticipation; that proclamation is what the church has spent 4 Sundays preparing their hearts to receive, and is the fulfillment of the season.

*Hope, peace, joy, and love!
These are gifts you bring from above.
Jesus, Emmanuel, come to be
light of your love, reflected in me.*

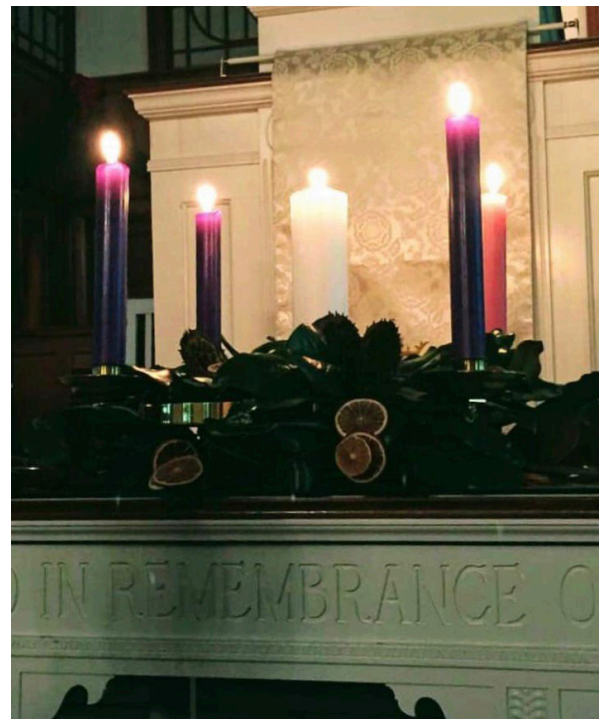
*-Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love
#80 in Celebrating Grace Hymnal*

Christmastide

Twelve Days Celebrating the Incarnation



“For unto you is born this in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord!”



Those resounding words of hope proclaimed by the Christmas angel in the Gospel According to Luke resound and resonate for not one single day, but for twelve of them—just as the old song and the lights along US-25E in Barbourville say.

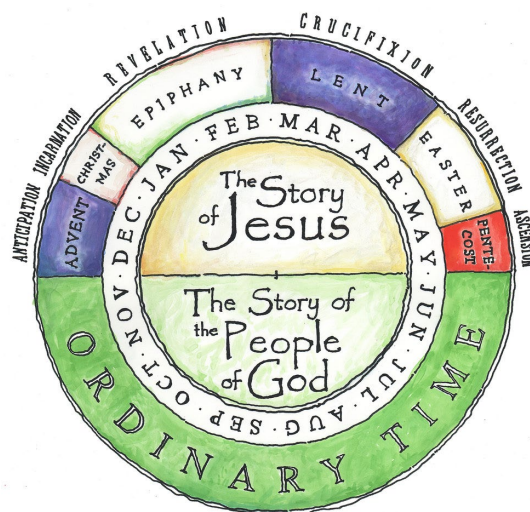
The season of Christmastide lasts from sundown on Christmas Eve through sundown on January 5. First-century Jews considered sundown the end of one day and the beginning of the next. This accounting difference influenced the early church and its calendars, and still today we feel that influence around Christmas and Easter especially.

As the image above shows, the color of the season is white. During Christmastide, this color “dresses” the pulpit and the communion table (which symbolize the presence of Christ—his teaching and his Supper), and is matched by the stoles worn around the necks of the ministers (who symbolize Christ’s disciples). White symbolizes purity is the color used for the highest of holy days and seasons in the year, especially Christmastide and Eastertide. Gold is commonly used to embellish white paraments (on the pulpit and the communion table) and stoles (worn by the ministers), further emphasizing purity and adding a precious element to the symbol. White [and gold] are also used on special holy days like Epiphany of the Lord, Baptism of the Lord, and All Saints Sundays, and on occasions that mark important rites of passage in human lives like dedications, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. In Christmastide, God is born and dedicated in the temple in the person of Jesus Christ, making white the right color for the season for all of the above.

The Advent Wreath now complete—all 5 candles aflame—continues to be the central symbol of this season. The light is bright. Christ is born. We celebrate in this season the mystery of a God who loves us and loves the world so much that he moved in next door, experienced our joys and sorrows, and showed us a better way to live.

Epiphany and the Season Thereafter

A Time of Pondering the Ongoing Revelation of God in Jesus Christ



On Christmas Day, the church reads the nativity story in the Gospel According to Luke. That story is thoroughly Jewish. Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, Jesus, and even the shepherds—they’re all Jewish. The city in which this great thing happens is the “city

of David,” the ultimate Jewish king. Christ is born—“good news of great joy for all people” comes—in the person of Israel’s savior.

Thirteen days later, on January 6, is the Epiphany of the Lord. Many Protestant churches celebrate this holy day on the Sunday nearest it, and call it Epiphany of the Lord Sunday. This holy day is a celebration of the coming of the magi as told in the nativity story in Matthew’s Gospel, and brings the season of Christmastide to its conclusion. The church lingers in the light of the manger through Epiphany of the Lord Sunday, pondering in their hearts as did Mary the wonderful, joyous news of Christ’s birth.

As the above image shows, the color of Epiphany of the Lord Sunday is white, as at Christmas, and the central symbol of the day is the magi and their gifts. Whereas Luke’s nativity story is Jewish, Matthew’s nativity story marks the arrival of Gentiles in the story of Jesus. The magi come bearing gifts are fit for a king...and fit for a king’s funeral. Like the Jewish shepherds, the Gentile magi recognize this child as their king...and their savior. “Good news of great joy for *all* people,” indeed.

Epiphany of the Lord Sunday is a single day, and the Sundays following it are referred to as the “Sundays after Epiphany” (First, Second, Third, etc.). These Sundays focus both on the coming of age of Jesus (a bar mitzvah in the temple at age 12, a baptism in the Jordan River at age 30), and the subsequent calling of disciples and beginning of public ministry. The Sundays after Epiphany continue to peel back the layers of the mystery of Christ’s revelation to all by exploring stories of Jesus’ ministry that reveal him as something more than he appears to be.

In the image above the edges of the Epiphany period are green, the color of the Sundays after Epiphany (except for Baptism of the Lord Sunday, which is white for reasons detailed in the Christmastide section). During the Season after Epiphany, this color “dresses” the pulpit and the communion table (which symbolize the presence of Christ—his teaching and his Supper), and is matched by the stoles worn around the necks of the ministers (who symbolize Christ’s disciples). Green symbolizes the renewal and thriving of vegetation, and more generally all living things. It points to the virtue of slow and steady growth, as in plant life, and points us to the Gospel’s promise of new life for all creation.

The Season after Epiphany comes to an end on Ash Wednesday—the first day of Lent. The final Sunday of the Season after Epiphany is Transfiguration Sunday, on which a voice from within a mountaintop cloud declares to Peter, James, and John, “This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!” This clear word atop the mountain recalls Moses’ and Elijah’s similar experiences, and completes what Epiphany began by explicitly naming Jesus as the Son of God.

*As they
most rare
at the manger
bare,
so may we
joy,
pure and free
alloy,
all our
treasures
Christ, to
heavenly king.*

Gladness Men

Celebrating



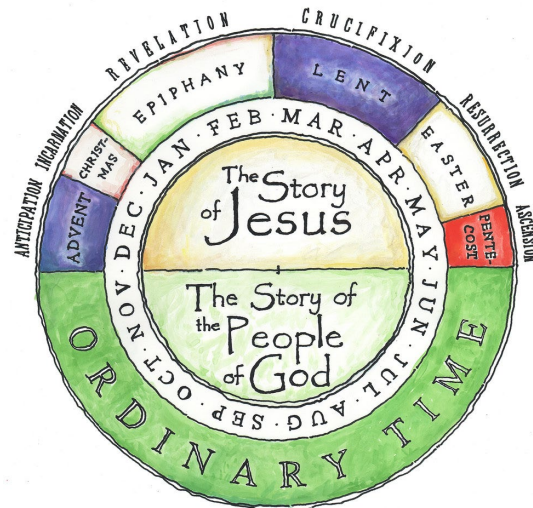
*offered gifts
rude and
with holy
from sin's
costliest
bring,
Thee, our*

*-As with
of Old
#150 in
Grace*

Hymnal

Lent

Six Weeks of Repentance and Preparation



Lent and Advent are siblings. Each uses Tyrian purple as the color of the season (see the Advent section). Each uses a candle arrangement to mark time and track the pilgrimage of the church through a season of anticipation and preparation. Each is a period of increased prayer, fasting, and service ahead of the holiest days and seasons of the year. One group of worship scholars say it this way: “Lent is a time for evangelism and for true conversion—a time for growing through repentance, fellowship, prayer, fasting, and concentration upon our baptismal covenant. We are signs of God’s kingdom to this world.” So it is with Lent and Advent both. They are siblings.

As the image above shows, the color of the season is purple. During Lent, this color “dresses” the pulpit and the communion table (which symbolize the presence of Christ—his teachings and his Supper), and is matched by the stoles worn around the necks of the ministers (who symbolize Christ’s disciples). In the Ancient Near East, purple was the color of royalty. The dye was produced by a labor-intensive process from the secretions of sea snails in the city of Tyre, and as a result, the purple dye was expensive. It came to be favored by rulers who could afford it, and who liked that the dye did not easily fade, even becoming brighter and more beautiful with wear. Tyrian purple, then, is the perfect color for the season celebrating a King who has come to take away the sins of the world and open the gates of eternal life to all by conquering the greatest of all enemies: death.

Lent begins not on a Sunday, but on a Wednesday. On Ash Wednesday, we burn palm branches that were last year used to celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The ashes that remain become a reminder of our own morality (Jesus was making a moral statement on Palm Sunday) and mortality (Jesus was going to his death on Palm Sunday). We receive the ashes in an ancient way, in a cruciform shape on our foreheads, with ancient words: “From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return.” These

words are a haunting reminder of our mortality, and a means of asking us as Mary Oliver once did “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” Like Mary Oliver’s question, the ancient Christian words are rhetorical, uttered as the cross is inscribed, symbolizing the answer: Live as we promised God we would when we waded into the waters of baptism and made a covenant with Christ.

The central symbol of worship in Lent at First Baptist Church is the 7-candle Lenten Light Candelabra. The Candelabra is sibling to the Advent Wreath just as Lent is sibling to Advent. Unlike the Advent Wreath, the Candelabra doesn’t boast a centuries-long legacy. The Lenten Lights idea is a recent invention by Evangelical author and speaker Noel Piper; the Candelabra used in worship at First Baptist Church is unique. It was designed by Rev. Zach Bay, and crafted by church members Charlie Nagle and Roy Asher.

Unlike the Advent Wreath, the simple and rustic stained wood Lenten Lights Candelabra is unadorned. The visible wood grain and long, heavy design symbolize the cross upon which Jesus

breathed his last. In Ancient Rome, the cross was a particularly cruel execution method, used not just to torture and kill those Rome deemed criminals, but also to make an example of them for all to see. The crucified were denied all privacy; their execution was a public event just as hangings were in early America. They were public events for the community, but also for the friends and family of the crucified.



In ancient Rome, most crucified people were left on the cross long after they died. Their bodies would be eaten first by birds, and then, after they finally fell to the ground, by scavengers. In Roman mythology, this was punishment even beyond life—by denying a proper burial, the Romans were denying this person entry into the afterlife.

Also, unlike the Advent Wreath, the Lenten Lights Candelabra is not circular, but linear. As such, it represents a very specific period in history—the period of time after which Jesus “set his face toward Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51)—toward Palm Sunday’s entry, Maundy Thursday’s supper, Good Friday’s cross, and Holy Saturday’s deafening silence. The candles are placed 3 inches from the edges of the Candelabra, and 7 inches from one another. Three symbolizes the coming Triduum (Latin: “three days,” see below). Seven symbolizes the creation, here being un-created, and the seven days of the week that separate each of the Sundays in Lent on which the candles are serviced.

The candles themselves are, like the candles of the Advent Wreath, a sign of the light shining in the darkness. However, unlike the growing light of Advent, Lent’s light fades as each

successive Sunday brings the church nearer Golgotha and the foot of Jesus' cross. Each Sunday, at the conclusion of the worship service, the flame of a candle is snuffed and the light that grew brighter in Advent now grows weaker in Lent. The Lenten Lights are not named like Advent's candles (Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love), but there is similarity. They are all purple except one. The rose-colored candle of Joy on the Advent wreath has a sibling on the Lenten Lights Candelabra. The Fourth Sunday in Lent is traditionally known as Laetare Sunday; Laetare is Latin for "rejoice," and comes from the Latin version of Isaiah 66:10. Laetare Sunday, like Gaudete Sunday (Latin, also meaning "rejoice"), signals to with a rose-colored candle that the church has passed the halfway point in the season. It is a Sunday of celebration in the midst of an austere time—a reminder that even in "the valley of the shadow of death," there is what C.S. Lewis called in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* a "deep magic from before the dawn of time" at work in God's Great Story. Even Lent with its rough wood and long shadows is a redemption story, and we are being redeemed.

*Lord who throughout these forty days for us did fast and pray,
teach us, O Christ, to mourn our sins and close by You to stay.*

*As you with Satan did contend, and did the victory win,
O give us strength in You to fight, in You to conquer sin.*

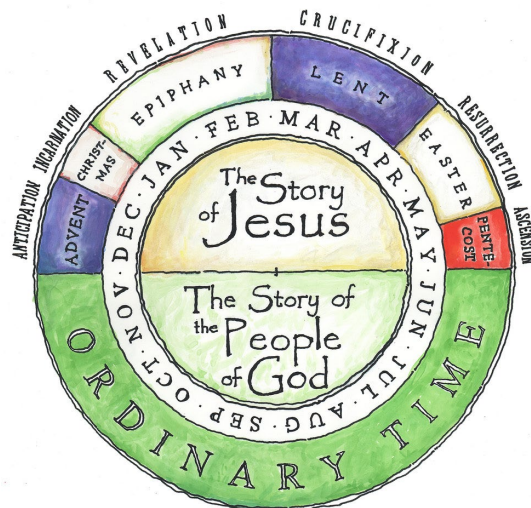
*And through these days of penitence, and through your passiontide,
forevermore, in life and death, O Christ, with us abide.*

*Abide with us, that through this life of doubts and hope and pain,
an Easter of unending joy we may at last attain!*

*-Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days
#169 in Celebrating Grace Hymnal*

The Easter Triduum

The Three Most Sacred Days of the Year



Triduum is Latin for “three days,” and the Easter Triduum is the period of time spanning the evening of Maundy Thursday through the evening of Easter Sunday. The Triduum straddles Lent and Easter. It is not a separate season, but rather, a bridge that connects two seasons. It belongs to both. Despite the three-day span, the Triduum is consisted to be one long service of worship—that is, when the Maundy Thursday service concludes, it does so with a comma rather than a period, and the church will on Good Friday pick up exactly where it left off the night before. The same is true at the end of the Good Friday service; on Holy Saturday, the church picks up exactly where it left off—with Jesus in the tomb—and observes silence while Jesus lays at rest. Finally, neither Maundy Thursday’s supper, nor Good Friday’s cross, nor Holy Saturday’s silence gets the last word. Holy Saturday also ends with a comma, and the church again picks up exactly where it left off, and against all odds finds the tomb empty on Resurrection of the Lord Sunday (Easter).

There are 6 Sundays in Lent, but 7 candles on the Lenten Lights Candelabra. The final candle is snuffed at the conclusion of Maundy Thursday. At First Baptist Church, we begin the Maundy Thursday service around the candlelit tables in the Fellowship Hall, commemorating Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples. We conclude Maundy Thursday by walking up the steps to the Sanctuary—to Gethsemane—and observing the Office of Tenebrae (Latin: “shadows”). The Office of Tenebrae is a series of eight Scripture Lessons reminiscent of Advent’s eight Scripture Lessons read in the Lessons, Carols, and Candlelight Service. In the Lessons, Carols, and Candlelight Service, the light grows brighter and brighter—through prophesy, to promise, to pregnancy—to the birth of Jesus and the lighting of our Live Nativity. In the Office of Tenebrae, the light fades and the shadows grow longer and darker—through betrayal, to desertion, to arrest—to the stripping of Lent’s purple paraments from the pulpit and communion table, symbolizing the Roman soldiers stripping the purple robe from Jesus’ body. The last words of the last Lesson in the Office of Tenebrae at the end of the Maundy Thursday service are from Mark 15:20: “Then they led him out to crucify him.”

Good Friday is the day that death, like the Witch in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, triumphs. The purple paraments and stoles, along with the palm branches from the triumphal entry of the previous Sunday, now litter the Sanctuary floor. The altar is bare. The ministers wear black. From noon until three in the afternoon (Matthew 27:45), the church sits and keeps vigil at

the foot of the cross with Jesus mother Mary, her sister Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus is dying now. The light that flared into the world at Advent is now all but gone. Death appears to win out, as it always has. The three-hour service is divided into 7, 25-minute parts, each one consisting of music, prayer, a spoken meditation, and silence—all centered around one of the Seven Last Words Jesus uttered from the cross. After The Seventh Word, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” Jesus dies. The church departs in silence to grieve and to ponder the depths of God’s love for humankind.

Holy Saturday is a day of silence. The congregation has practiced for Saturday’s deep and long silence all year, each Sunday, with the Discipline of Silence at the conclusion of the sermon. Holy Saturday brings the deepest of all silences—the silence of a tomb. On this day, the Christians are to keep as much silence as they are able in honor of the one who “laid down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

If the story ended there, it would not be Gospel—it would not be “good news.” But finally, and against all odds, the church comes to the tomb again on the next day and finds that it is empty. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Death does not win! That’s oh so good news! That’s the Gospel of Jesus Christ! The palm and the purple are put away for another year. White and gold now dress the pulpit and the communion table that was two days earlier stripped bare. The church prays and sings and proclaims the fulfillment of Advent’s “good news of great joy for all people.” The savior who was born has now been raised from the dead, proclaiming the good news of the Gospel for all people: Death does not win. It may sting and it may ache—it always gets its day in the lives of human beings—but because of God’s love and amazing grace, it does not get the last day. It does not get the last word. The last word belongs to God, and the last word is “Mercy.”

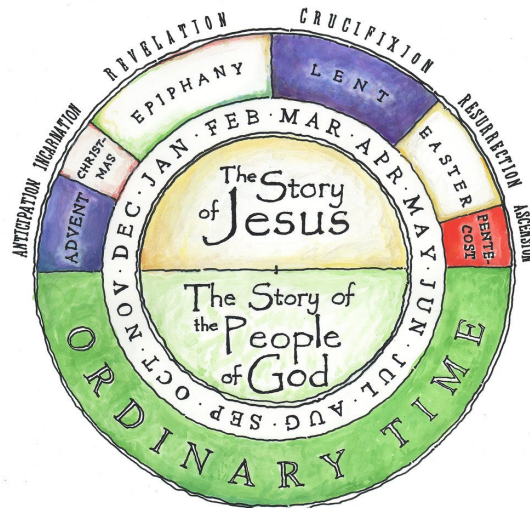
*Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so; ...
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.*

-The Reverend John Donne

16th Century Poet and Church of England Pastor

Eastertide

Fifty Days and Seven Weeks of Resurrection



Advent and Lent are siblings. Eastertide has neither sibling nor peer in the worship of the church. Advent's 4 weeks and Lent's 6 weeks are eclipsed by Eastertide's 7 weeks. The church has long called the longest season of the year the "The Great Fifty Days of Easter," and used them to emphasize the centerpiece of God's Great Story: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The most gruesome of all ancient symbols, Rome's cross is now transfigured into a symbol of hope for all humankind. Even on the other side of such a terrible death as that of Jesus of Nazareth is God, arms open wide.

As the image above shows rather perfectly, the color of Eastertide is white, gilded in gold. White symbolizes the clean linen burial cloths that were used to wrap Jesus' body before he was laid in the tomb (Matthew 27:59). In the wake of Easter burial cloths, like the cross, are no longer only a symbol of death—they are now also a symbol of hope. Gold is among the most precious of all elements on earth, and adorns the white with a sign that the lordship of Jesus Christ rises above all purple-wearing kings and queens the world over.

The Great Fifty Days of Eastertide begin in the final day of the Easter Triduum—on Resurrection of the Lord Sunday, which is Easter Sunday. On Easter Sunday, we bring out the large brass Paschal Candle Stand, and fit it with a Christ Candle larger than any other used in any other season of worship. The Paschal Candle is white and gold and nearly 3 feet tall, symbolizing that Jesus is the Christ, the second person of the three-part Holy Trinity. It sits atop a nearly 4-foot tall stand, placing the flame nearly 7 feet from the floor. Seven—the number of weeks in Eastertide and of days of creation in Genesis—symbolizes what Jesus said from the cross in one of The Seven Last Words: "It is finished." And, as God said in the beginning: "It is good." Naming the Easter Christ Candle "Paschal" (Latin: 'of Passover') is important: in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we Christians are experiencing our own Passover story—from the wilderness, through the dangers of sea, and into the promised land. The Paschal Candle is lit on Easter Sunday with a Litany of Resurrection, and burns throughout The Great Fifty Days of Eastertide.

We are Easter people. Not only because we work at having faith in the promises of God for us in Jesus Christ, but because we literally structure our time as a congregation each year so that Easter is the single largest focus of our worship together. We linger in worship at the tomb and in the garden and in the upper room, joining the disciples to see the resurrected Christ again and again and again throughout the season of Eastertide. And on the last day of Eastertide—on Ascension of the Lord Sunday—we say goodbye again, and stand along the roadside in Bethany blinking up into the heavens as Jesus ascends to the throne of God (Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:4-11—remember: Luke and Acts go together!). And as it says in Luke’s Gospel, as he was taken up, “he lifted his hands and blessed them.” And “They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem overwhelmed with joy.”

*Dressed for Easter
Altar cross and candle,
white and gold
paraments, and Paschal
Candle*

EASTERTIDE

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today 194

1. Christ the Lord is risen to - day, Al - le - lu - ia!
 2. Love's re - deem - ing work is done, Al - le - lu - ia!
 3. Lives a - gain our glo - rious King, Al - le - lu - ia!
 4. Soar we now where Christ has led, Al - le - lu - ia!

Earth and heav - en join to say, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Fought the fight, the bat - tle won, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Where, O Death, is now thy sting? Al - le - lu - ia!
 Fol - lowing our ex - alt - ed Head, Al - le - lu - ia!

Raise your joys and tri - umphs high, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Death in vain for - bids Him rise, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Dy - ing once He all doth save, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Made like Him, like Him we rise, Al - le - lu - ia!

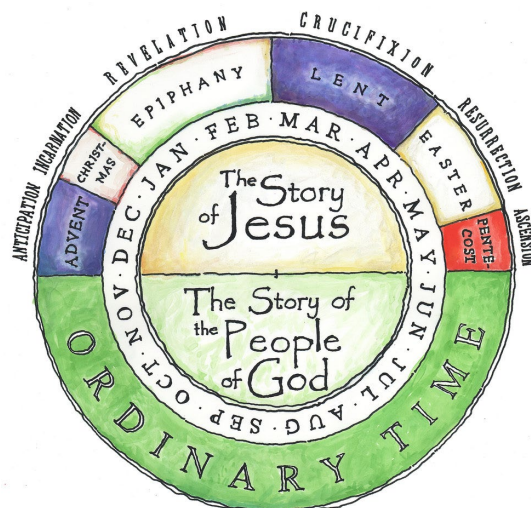
Sing, ye heavens, and earth, re - ply, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Christ hath o - pened Par - a - dise, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Where thy vic - to - ry, O grave? Al - le - lu - ia!
 Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Al - le - lu - ia!

WORDS: Charles Wesley, 1739, alt.
 MUSIC: *Lyra Davidica*, 1708

EASTER HYMN
 7.7.7.7 with alleluias



The Day of Pentecost
The Birthday of the Church



The Day of Pentecost stands on its own, not as a season of the church year, but as a single wonderfully large day. “Day of Pentecost” comes directly from the New Testament Greek words *hemera pentekostes* in Acts 2:1, and follows soon after the story of Jesus’ ascension into the heavens. Biblical scholar Justo Gonzalez calls Acts “The Gospel of the Spirit” in one of his books. His implication is that the Gospel of Luke is Volume 1: The Gospel of Jesus Christ; and that the book of Acts is Volume 2: The Gospel of the Holy Spirit. Together, as scholars believe they belong, Luke-Acts tells the story of Jesus in life, in death, and in life beyond death—and the story of the birth of the Church in that last stage when Jesus returns on the Day of Pentecost in the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church.

The color of Pentecost Day is red. At First Baptist Church, a red quilt made for Rev. Zach Bay by church member Tina Mike “dresses” the pulpit, and red covers the communion table. Red stoles are worn by the ministers, and very large red paraments hang from the Sanctuary ceiling above the choir loft—all symbolizing the importance of this day. Red is the color of fire, and points our attention to humanity’s encounters with God, always wild and fierce and fiery. When Moses goes atop Mount Sinai to meet with God, he encounters a flaming bush. When Elijah duels with the prophets of Ba’al, God shows up in a fireball that consumes the entire altar. When Isaiah is called, a burning coal is touched to his lips; when Ezekiel sees his first vision of God, it looked “something like gleaming amber,” and the creatures looked “like blazing coals, like torches,” and “like lightning streaking back and forth.” And, on the Day of Pentecost, when God showed up in the midst of the disciples, “flames of fire alighting on each [of the disciples]” gathered in a house (Acts 2:1-4). There is continuity in God’s Great Story, even after Jesus ascends into the heavens.

As you notice in the image above, on Pentecost Day, we come to the end of “The Story of Jesus,” and the beginning of “The Story of the People of God.” Of course, such a division is artificial, for the story of Jesus never really ends, but for the purposes of worship, we shift our weight from telling the story of God in Jesus Christ to telling the story of God in Christ’s Church. Pentecost Day is the hand-off from Jesus to the Holy Spirit and the Church, and a reminder that even though Jesus has ascended, he meant it when he said, “I will ask the Father, and he will send another advocate, who will be with you forever” (Acts 14:16). An advocate as wild and fiery as YHWH and Jesus of Nazareth, so much so, that the ancient Celtic Christians referred to it not as a dove, but as a wild goose.



From the first time I heard this it stirred something in my heart. Yes, there is a wildness to the Holy Spirit. The

dominant images of the Holy Spirit are a meek dove or a flickering flame of a candle, both of which are in one way accurate. But the Holy Spirit is more than that. God’s Spirit is power and blows not merely like a gentle breeze but at times like a raging wind. Sometimes, this power makes us nervous. We like the idea of the Holy Spirit as a flame on a candle but a raging fire often causes anxiety. Our first instinct is to get it under control. It’s hard to control a wild goose; believe me, I know.

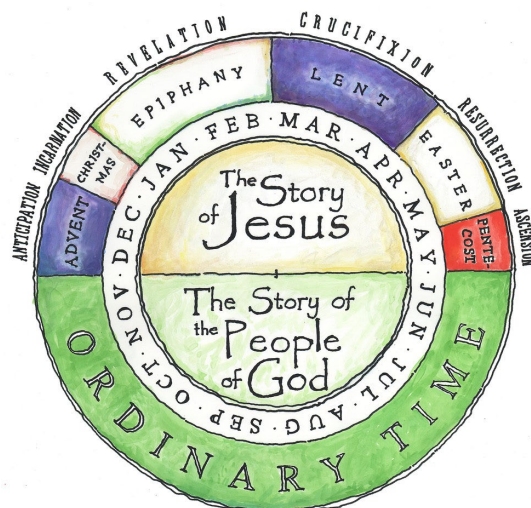
-Father Dave Pivonka

Sacred Heart Province of Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular

So it was with YHWH. So it was with Jesus. So it is with the Holy Spirit. The message of Pentecost is as simple as it is startling: God will thwart our attempts at power and control and hubris, desiring instead that we do as the disciples did, leave our nets behind and “Come, follow me.”

Ordinary Time

The Rest of the Story



Ordinary Time is, as Paul Harvey used to say, “The rest of the story.” The color of the season is just right: green. Unlike purple and white and red which come from specific passages of Scripture surrounding Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, green comes from a different place: creation. Green plants grow over the years and evolve over the centuries, and are perhaps the best symbols there are for the life of faith lived by ordinary people in ordinary places in ordinary times—which is most of us. And green plants, as Jesus pointed out in the Sermon on the Mount, are alive today and gone tomorrow (Matthew 6:30). In a very real sense, so it is with us. J.R.R. Tolkien wrote a magnificent line and put it on the lips of Gandalf the Grey in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo Baggins laments the darkness that has come into his life with the ring of power: “I wish it need not have happened in my time.” And Gandalf replies: “So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” That’s what Ordinary Time is for.

At First Baptist Church, we get a small taste of Ordinary Time in the Season After Epiphany of the Lord Sunday. Epiphany of the Lord Sunday is the first Sunday in January, and it marks the end of Christmastide and the transition in January to the stories of Jesus’ coming of age. The magi come and visit on Epiphany. By the second Sunday in January, Jesus is 12 years old having his bar mitzvah in the Temple with the teachers. By the third Sunday in January, Jesus at 30 years of age goes to John the Baptist and is baptized in the Jordan River. The last Sunday in January—the Third Sunday after the Epiphany—Jesus calls his disciples and begins his ministry in Galilee. From there until the beginning of Lent, we dip our toes into a short period of Ordinary Time—a time during which we as the church listen to the teachings of Jesus (and Moses and the Psalmists and Paul) and do the slow, hard work of considering how we might live better, more faithful lives. In 2019, Ash Wednesday didn’t come until the first of March, and so we spent our four Ordinary Time Sundays (the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany...the Fifth...the Sixth...the Seventh) in February with a worship theme titled “Blessed are...: Jesus begins his teaching ministry.”

**“Blessed Are...”: Jesus Begins His Teaching Ministry
A February Worship Series**

February 3 - Nehemiah 8:1-10; Luke 4:14-21
“The Beginning of the Good News”

Rev. Zach Bay, Pastor

February 10 - Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 4:21-30

“Even Them?”

Rev. Zach Bay, Pastor

February 17 - Psalm 1; Luke 6:17-26

“Especially Them”

Rev. Zach Bay, Pastor

February 24 - Isaiah 55:6-9; Luke 6:27-38

“What Have We Learned in Church?”

Rev. Jack Pennington, Pastor Emeritus

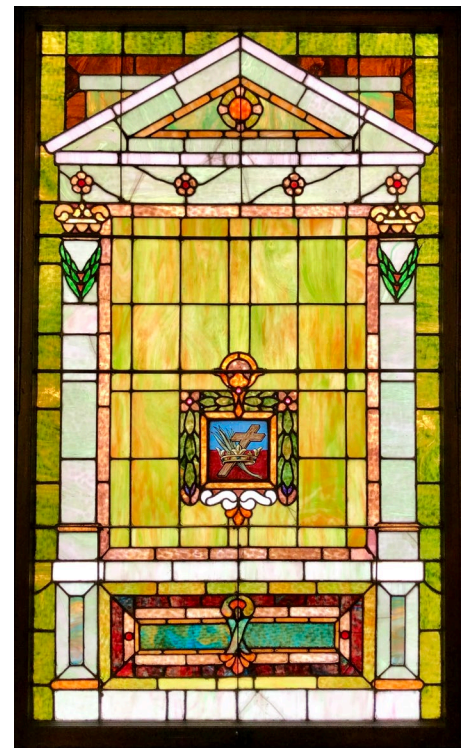
In the summer months, Ordinary Time is counted as Sundays after Pentecost rather than after Epiphany, but the color and the emphasis is the same. The church focuses on its own slow and steady spiritual growth, and on how that informs its action in the world. This is the time of year for longer sermon series that follow a theme or a practice or an idea present in the biblical text, church history, and/or theology. In June, July, August, and September of 2018, for 15 weeks, we worshiped around our “Stories that Sustain.” Our praying and singing and preaching were guided each week by 1 of 15 favorite Scripture passages submitted by church members as passages that have sustained and changed their lives. And because we do church together, what sustains and changes one life ripples out and sustains and changes us all.

In the summer months, Ordinary Time stretches on like the long summer days, often reaching into the upper twenties (as in, the Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Pentecost). These designations on the Order of Worship may seem rather uneventful and uninformative, but they are not so. The high numbers remind us, like the green paraments and stoles, that spiritual growth is long, slow work. The weekly reference to Pentecost reminds us that as we are about that work, we are not alone. The advocate Jesus promised—the Holy Spirit—is with us always, to the very end.

Epilogue

I hope that you have enjoyed reading and studying this guide to The Worship of God at First Baptist Church of Middlesboro, KY, as much as I have enjoyed thinking it through and writing it down. Truth be told, I wrote it for myself. I do my best thinking when I am writing. But, on the off-chance that the congregation that calls me Pastor might benefit from reading it, I decided to dress it up and make it available to you. , sisters and brothers, may overhear and understand and enjoy the riches of worship at First Baptist Church.

I am very passionate about worship. I ponder it, I study it, and I believe in it. I believe in its capacity to “mold us and make us,” little by little, into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. I believe that it is sometimes fun, sometimes dry,



sometimes comforting, and sometimes challenging—just like the rest of life. Fred Craddock once said that a preacher does a congregation a disservice by offering them a great sermon every Sunday. There are many ways to read that line, but interpretation of it I like best is this: Life isn't always great—sometimes it's fun and sometimes it's dry and sometimes it's grand and sometimes it's downright awful. The Bible has all of those experiences in it, and so I believe that worship ought to be a place where all of those experiences can show up and be held by the church with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout Scripture, God promises to show up and, as John's Gospel likes to say, "abide." The Bible and the church year end in the same way—with the bold statement "Christ is Lord!" The Bible says so this way: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ... I heard a loud voice from the throne say, 'Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples.'" The church calendar says it by ending the long sequence of Sundays after Pentecost with a holy day: Reign of Christ Sunday. One of the Revised Common Lectionary texts offered for that day is Colossians 1:11-20, which reads, "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption...He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things..."

The final word of our year of worship together—whichever year it happens to be—is the same as the first word: "Christ is Lord!"



*Reign of Christ Banner, TEL Chapel at First Baptist Church
By: Beth C. Parker*



first baptist church
middlesboro