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## Explaining the Seasons of the Church Calendar

The cycle of the Church year has developed through the life of the church from the very beginning. The early church decided very quickly on the three most important festivals or dates for celebration:

- Easter (the resurrection of Jesus),
- Christmas (the birth of Jesus), and
- Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit in wind and flame).

Each of these festivals then had preparation periods in the lead up to the actual celebration. And so developed the seasons of Lent (preparing for Easter) and Advent (preparing for Christmas). Many early Christians also used the time between Easter and Pentecost to prepare for baptism.

It is biblically-based insofar as Easter is set according to the phase of the moon that was said to be the time that Jesus died (and generally coincides with the Jewish Passover festival). Lent is said to reflect the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness before commencing his ministry. There is about 50 days between Easter and Pentecost, again reflecting the Jewish festivals that these Christian festivals interacted with. However, much of the rest of the calendar is steeped more deeply in church tradition than it is specifically based on Scripture.

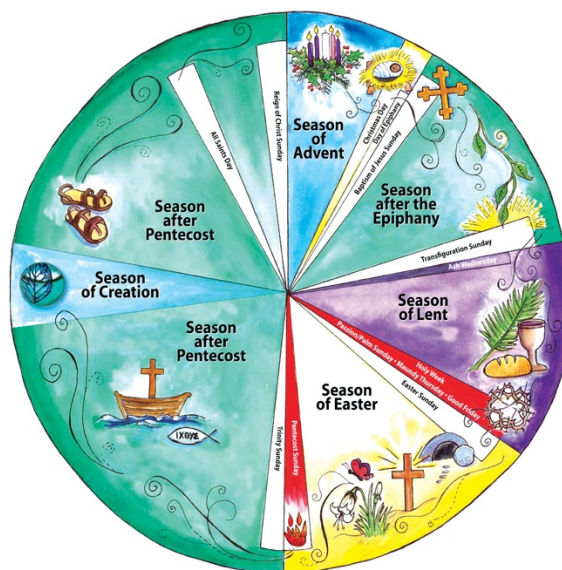
Nevertheless, over the centuries, the church has developed these festivals and other celebrations further. And so there have developed many more traditions surrounding each of these celebrations. Some of these traditions we include in our worship today, for example during Advent we often have an Advent wreath with 5 candles to count down towards Christmas Day.

Here is a brief description of each of the seasons in the cycle:

- Advent – begins 4 Sundays before Christmas. It is a time of preparing for the “coming” of Christ
- Christmas – begins on 25 December and ends with Epiphany on 6 January (the 12 Days of Christmas). Epiphany remembers the coming of the Magi to visit Jesus.
- There are usually 4-8 weeks of “ordinary time” between Christmas and Lent
- Lent – 40 days + Sundays prior to Easter. It is a time of reflection and repentance as we prepare to remember Jesus’ death and to celebrate his resurrection.
- Easter – Easter day + 7 Sundays – celebrating the resurrection of Christ
- Pentecost – celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, 50 days after Easter.
- “Ordinary” time – a time of teaching and growth
- Season of Creation – Sundays in September – this is a relatively new addition to the calendar to celebrate God’s good creation and to remind us of our responsibility to care for it

Of course, in amongst these celebrations are others such as the Uniting Church Anniversary (22 June), All Saints Day (1 November) and other celebrations and feast days that we as a church or as a local congregation feel it is important to remember. At Kiama-Jamberoo Uniting Church, we include recognition of NAIDOC Week, and days to give thanks for the work of UnitingWorld and local activities such as the Men’s Shed.

Here is a circular diagram of the cycle:



*What are the colours all about?*

Colours were developed to reflect the over-riding themes of the season...

- White – the symbol of resurrection, life, celebration – used at Christmas and Easter.
- Purple – the symbol of preparation and repentance – used in Lent and Advent.
- Red – the symbol of the Holy Spirit – used at Pentecost and other celebrations such as church anniversaries and sometimes at baptisms and confirmations.
- Green – the symbol of growth – used at most other times.
- Blue – sometimes used during Advent to represent hope.

*What is the “lectionary” and where does it fit in all this?*

Over the centuries the church has also come to realise that it is important that in the worshipping life of the church, there is some way of ensuring that we hear the full range of Scriptures that are entrusted to us. So there have been a number of attempts to put together a system of readings that will help us to read through the Scriptures in a structured way.

The Revised Common Lectionary was developed in the 1970s. It contains readings for each week of a 3-year cycle with a reading from the Old Testament, Psalms, the Gospels, and the New Testament. This is the system that our congregation has adopted and follows.

This year, 2021, we are in Year B of the cycle which focuses on Mark’s gospel along with readings from Isaiah, Samuel, Kings, Job, and Ruth; Corinthians, Ephesians, James and Hebrews.

More recently, the Narrative Lectionary has been developed by members from Luther Seminary in the USA. It is a four-year cycle of readings. On the Sundays from September through May each year the texts follow the sweep of the biblical story, from Creation through the early Christian church. The months in the middle of the year offer a time to explore particular books of the Bible more closely.

Please give me a call at any time if you have any questions, comments, thoughts – or just want to chat.  
blessings

*Kath*

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