

# The Liturgical Year

The liturgical year is a **school of prayer**. Just as the divinely instituted feasts of the Old Testament reminded the people of Israel of the principal events of their history, and allowed them to renew their covenant with God, the Church's liturgical year recounts:

- the creation of the world, the fall of Man, and coming judgment - giving us cause for repentance;
- the Incarnation, life, sufferings, death, Resurrection and Ascension of the only-begotten Word of God, for our sakes - giving us cause for thanksgiving;
- the lives of the Mother of God and of the saints - giving us cause for thanksgiving and hope, and encouragement in our own lives.

But the liturgical year is also a **source of God's grace**.

Through each feast and commemoration, the meaning of the feast is made present in the Church, and the grace of the feast is recalled; this meaning and grace enters into and enlightens the minds and hearts of the faithful as they take part in the liturgical year.

Finally, the liturgical year is **a means of union with Christ**. As we remember the events which led to our redemption, and the deeds of those who have lived under grace, the Holy Spirit (through the Church's liturgy) directs our minds and hearts toward the goal of salvation for ourselves and those around us, to so live in this life as to be made fit for eternal life in heaven.

## The Paschal Cycle

The basis of the liturgical year is a commemoration - a collective calling-to-mind - of the life, death and Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, for our salvation and redemption. It is this "Paschal mystery" which was prefigured in the Old Testament; symbolized in the baptism which makes us adopted sons and daughters of God, and members of the His Body, the Church; and imitated in the lives of Christians. The annual round of feasts commemorating this mystery is called the **Paschal cycle**.



The Paschal cycle	
10 weeks before Pascha	Preparation for the Great Fast
7 weeks before Pascha	The Great Fast (Holy Lent)
1 week before Pascha	Palm Sunday
the 6 days before Pascha	Great and Holy Week
(date varies)	PASCHA - The Passover of the Lord
the 6 days after Pascha	Bright Week
40 days after Pascha	The Ascension of the Lord
50 days after Pascha	Pentecost - the Descent of the Holy Spirit
A variable number of "weeks after Pentecost"	

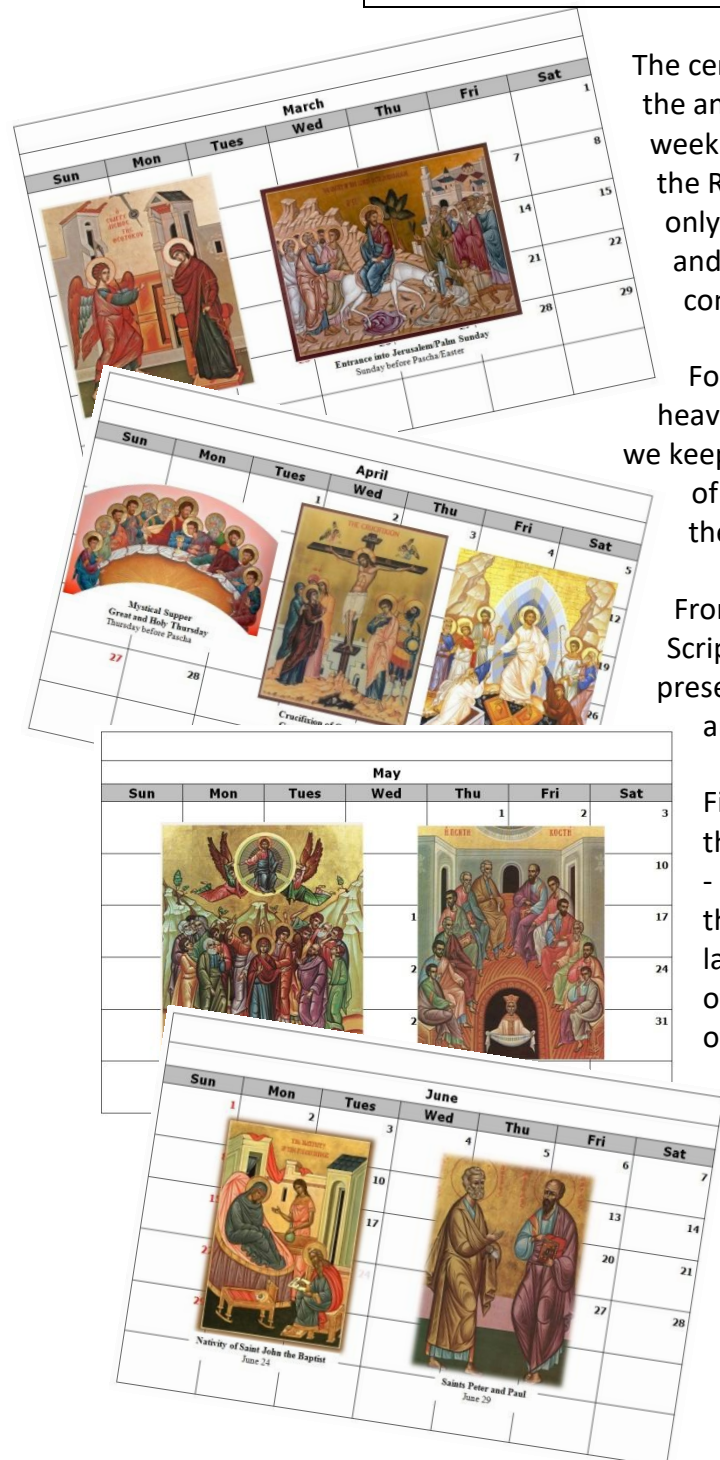
The center and summit of the entire liturgical year is **Pascha**, the annual feast of the Resurrection of Christ. For an entire week thereafter (called **Bright Week**), we use the hymns of the Resurrection that during the rest of the year are sung only on Sundays. For 50 days, we refrain from all fasting, and stand instead of kneel at all services, in commemoration of our Lord's Resurrection.

Forty days after Pascha, we celebrate our Lord's return to heaven, as the feast of the **Ascension**; and ten days later, we keep the feast of **Pentecost**, commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, and the beginning of their preaching of the Gospel.

From Pentecost onwards, the Church provides weekly Scripture readings from the Gospel and apostolic books, presenting the teachings and acts of our Lord Jesus Christ and the writings of the apostles on the life of grace.

Finally, as we approach the next celebration of Pascha, the Church leads us through 40 days "in the wilderness" - a forty day fast which recalls the forty years spent by the Israelites in the desert before entering the promised land. During this **Great Fast**, we recall the entire history of salvation from the Old Testament, and the prophecies of the coming Messiah, his suffering and glorification.

At end of the Great Fast, we commemorate our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, his betrayal, trial, crucifixion, death and burial, in the services of **Great and Holy Week**. On Saturday of this week, a long vigil





service commemorates the Old Testament foreshadowings of the Paschal Mystery - and begins the celebration of Pascha once again.

Alongside the Paschal cycle, we commemorate other events in the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of his Mother, significant events in the Church's history, and the lives of the saints of the Old and New Testament. These feasts are associated with particular days which do not change from year to year, and thus form the cycle of **fixed (immoveable) feasts**. By contrast, the Paschal cycle is sometimes called the cycle of **movable feasts**.

Each day of the year is associated with one or more commemorations. These events include:

- Feasts of our Lord which commemorate events outside the Paschal cycle: events in his early life, as well as his Transfiguration.
- Feasts of the Mother of God.
- Feasts of the saints of the Old and New Testament. Very often, these feasts take place on the anniversary of their deaths, their "birthday in heaven." For particularly important saints, there may be several feast-days throughout the year.

The best way to understand and benefit from the liturgical year is to keep the feasts, attentively and prayerfully! The feasts of the liturgical year have a freshness which makes it possible to learn from them, and thus draw nearer to God, in a new way every time we come back to them.

Make a resolution to take the opportunity to relive these events and actively participate in them as though they were just now taking place because **Christ is alive and active now!** Let us strive to be vocal witnesses in the sacred events of our Liturgical Year and exemplify these events in the actions of our daily lives.

Adapted from [http://mci.archpitt.org/liturgy/Liturgical\\_year.html](http://mci.archpitt.org/liturgy/Liturgical_year.html)

[Stationary Feasts](#)

[Movable Feasts- Paschal Cycle](#)

[Periods of Fast during the Liturgical Year](#)

