

# Solar and Sacred Seasons

The weeks of the year unfold through the four seasons. While solar seasons are reversed in the northern and southern hemispheres, the origins of sacred seasons were set from Biblical times from the time of the Exodus. For example, the command to celebrate Passover in springtime assumes a northern hemisphere setting. In *The Bible Through the Seasons* the entire Bible flows through the seasons every three years with passages sensitive to the sacred seasons. References to the solar seasons are limited, so that the plan will be suitable for God's people in the southern hemisphere.

This approach incorporates the traditional sacred names for the seasons and the counting of Sundays, while suggesting some changes for ease in using the three-year cycle of daily readings. The widespread use of *The Revised Common Lectionary* for Sunday worship also urges a method of naming Sundays consistent with the structure of the *Lectionary*.

## ***Advent to Epiphany***

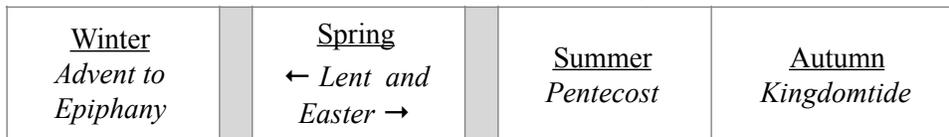
*(Winter in the Northern Hemisphere)*

Each of the four seasons is a quarter of a year with a norm of thirteen weeks. The four Sundays of Advent begin on the Sunday nearest November 30, the traditional date for St. Andrew's day. Next there is Christmas Week, occurring on or after Christmas Day. The first Sunday in January is celebrated as Epiphany Sunday, the traditional date being January 6. There are from ten to fifteen weeks in *Advent to Epiphany*, depending on the date of Easter. The week when Ash Wednesday occurs is the Last Week in Epiphany, beginning with Transfiguration Sunday.

## ***Lent and Easter***

*(Spring in the Northern Hemisphere)*

The Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. decreed that Easter would occur on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. According to lunar variation, there is about a month's range of dates for Easter, from March 22 to April 25. *Lent* begins six weeks before Easter. Ash Wednesday was introduced in the 7th century, adding four days before the First Sunday in Lent, to make forty days of fasting for the weekdays of Lent. (Fasting was not observed on Sundays.) There are seven weeks in *Easter*. The total number of weeks in *Lent and Easter* is always thirteen.



Depending upon the date of Easter, the season of *Lent and Easter* moves back and forth across the end of *Advent to Epiphany* and the beginning of the season of *Pentecost*. The mid-range of the date of Easter (April 10 to 16) results in all four seasons being thirteen weeks long. When an early Easter shortens *Epiphany* by one or two weeks (very rarely three), then *Pentecost* is lengthened by the corresponding number of weeks. In this case, the weeks at the end of *Epiphany* "leap ahead" as extra weeks needed at the beginning of *Pentecost*. When a late Easter lengthens *Epiphany* by a week (rarely two), then *Pentecost* is shortened by the corresponding week at the beginning which "leaps back" to the end of *Epiphany* and is added as an extra week.

**Note:** Every five or six years there are fifty-three weeks in the church calendar. This occurs when Christmas is on a Sunday or on a Saturday when the following year is a leap year. In those years, there is an extra week added to the Sundays after Epiphany. For the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they are as follows: '06, '12, '17, '23, '28, '34, '40, '45, and '50.

## ***Pentecost***

*(Summer in the Northern Hemisphere)*

Pentecost Sunday has its origins in the Jewish celebration of *Shavout*, also called "Pentecost"—fifty days after Passover. From the earliest centuries in the Christian calendar, Sundays after Pentecost were given ordinal numbers for counting—so many "Sundays after Pentecost."

The origins of the *Lectionary* date from 1969 when the Roman Catholic Church developed the *Lectionary for Mass*—the greatest revision of the Scriptures used in the Catholic Church since 1570! In order to free this half-year period of Sundays after Pentecost from being bound to a lunar, Easter reference, a new term was introduced for this time as well as for the time

after Epiphany. They were called “Sundays in Ordinary Time.” With the exception of the Sundays in Lent and Easter, these were based every year on a Sunday nearest a fixed date.

Many Protestant churches soon heralded this new arrangement of readings for worship. Though some changes were made in the selection of the first readings from the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament and Gospel selections were retained. The result was *The Revised Common Lectionary*. Many churches simply continue to name “Sundays after Pentecost” for purposes of worship. Though the term “ordinary” refers to the counting of Sundays as “ordinal” numbers, the common sense of the term “ordinary” naturally prevails. Yet time with God is anything but *ordinary*!

*The Bible Through the Seasons* follows the basic weekly design of the *Lectionary*; the Sunday readings are taken from that sequence. However, the following system is offered as a way to continue honoring the traditional sacred name of *Pentecost* as a season after *Lent and Easter*, without linking the numbering of the Sundays to those “after” Pentecost Sunday. Here is how it works.

With the exception of *Lent and Easter*, a fixed, solar frame of reference is provided for the remaining three seasons. The Sunday nearest June 1 is named *The First Sunday in Pentecost*. Rather than say that a Sunday is “after” Pentecost Sunday, which varies from year to year, we simply say that it is a Sunday “in” the season of Pentecost. Thus, except for some minor changes at the end of *Epiphany* and the beginning of *Pentecost* as noted above, the numbering of the Sundays in these seasons is the same for every year, since they relate to a Sunday nearest a fixed date. The last week in *Pentecost* is always the thirteenth, followed by the season of *Kingdomtide*, as explained below. By adopting this system of names, every Sunday in the year is given a liturgical name linked with the *Lectionary* readings. Rather than use the propositions “after” or “of”, the common use of “in” makes for consistency. With these adjustments, an easy-to-use structure is offered for the daily lectionary, which is *The Bible Through the Seasons*.

## ***Kingdomtide***

*(Autumn in the Northern Hemisphere)*

The name “Kingdomtide” was introduced in 1937 by the former Federal Council of Churches as a way of dividing in half the traditionally long, six-month period of the time after Pentecost Sunday. *The Book of Worship for Church and Home* published in 1965 for The United Methodist Church indicates that the season begins on the last Sunday in August—a period of thirteen or fourteen weeks; again, variation versus constancy. *The Bible Through the Seasons* proposes that this season begin on the Sunday nearest August 31. It is always thirteen weeks long. The last Sunday is named *Christ the King Sunday*. The following Sunday begins *The First Week in Advent* in the next year in the cycle.

## ***The Trinity in the Year***

The presence of the Blessed Trinity is reflected throughout the Church year. While all the persons of the Trinity act together, it is appropriate to honor a special sense of the activity of the Father in the first season, *Advent to Epiphany*. The second season, *Lent and Easter*, expresses in a unique way the saving acts of Jesus in his death and Resurrection. The third season, *Pentecost*, celebrates the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit outpoured after the Ascension of Jesus. The fourth season, Kingdomtide, is the season of fulfillment and harvest in which the nature of the Kingdom of God is celebrated in a special manner.

Living the Bible through the seasons is enhanced by the following progression associated with the sacred seasons:

Advent: *Coming*

Lent: *Journey to the Cross*

Christmas: *Presence*

Easter: *The Risen Body of Christ*

Epiphany: *Manifestation*

Pentecost: *The Indwelling Holy Spirit*

Kingdomtide: *The Kingdom of God Now*