

# Celebrating The Church Year

The Church has divided the calendar into holy seasons which celebrate the history of our salvation. With each season, there are changes in the prayers and readings of the liturgy and the colors of the priest's vestments. Faithful Christians also have special customs as the holy seasons change. For instance, there is the Advent wreath and its prayers in preparation for Christmas, sacrifices during Lent in memory of Our Lord's sufferings, and praying the Rosary during the months of October and May in honor of Our Blessed Mother.

Within each season, there are days set aside to honor events in salvation history and events in the life of Our Blessed Mother. There are also many days in the Church year set aside in memory of the saints. That is because the Church wishes to take notice of certain men, women, boys, and girls who were ordinary people like us, yet who learned to love God in an extraordinary way. And since everyone in Heaven is a saint, even those who have not been canonized by the Church, there is a special feast day for all of them, too. It is All Saints' Day, on November 1.

The feasts of the Church vary in importance. Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas are among the greatest Holy Days in the Church year.

Each country's bishops decide which days are Holy Days of Obligation: that is, days on which all Catholics must attend Mass.

It is a good idea to look at a Catholic calendar to keep track of the many feasts and saints' days. The word "holiday" means holy day, and we can celebrate many Church holidays all year round. There may be some saints that you especially like or wish to learn more about, such as a saint whose name you bear. When that saint's feast comes around, attend Mass, visit the Blessed Sacrament, or say a special prayer to that saint. Read a book on that saint's life. Some families have parties for their children on the feast days of their patron saints.

Here are some of the important Holy Days of the Church year.

Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God (*January 1*): We honor Mary because of her special privilege in being the Mother of Jesus, true God and true man.

Epiphany (*January 6*): We celebrate the visit of the three wise men to the infant Jesus.

Baptism of the Lord (*Sunday after Epiphany*): This marks the beginning of Jesus' public life.

Presentation (*February 2*): When the infant Jesus was brought to the Temple of Jerusalem.

Chair of Peter (*February 22*): This ancient feast reminds us of the unity our Church finds in the Pope.

Saint Joseph (*March 19*): We remember Joseph, the foster father of Jesus and guardian of the universal Church.

The Annunciation (*March 25*): When Gabriel came to Mary to tell her she would be the Mother of Jesus. Mary agreed to God's plan, and on this day Jesus began his life on earth, as a tiny unborn child inside his Mother.

Holy Week (*date varies*): We commemorate the Passion and death of Jesus.

Easter (*date varies*): We celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus.

Ascension (*forty days after Easter*): We commemorate the day Jesus returned to his Father in Heaven.

Visitation (*May 31*): Mary visited Elizabeth, who was pregnant with Saint John the Baptist. Saint Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and knew that Mary was the Mother of the Savior.

Pentecost (*fifty days after Easter*): We celebrate the birthday of the Church when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles.

Holy Trinity (*Sunday after Pentecost*): We celebrate the mystery of the three Persons in One God.

Corpus Christi (*Thursday after Holy Trinity Sunday*): These words are Latin for "the Body of Christ". This feast honors Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Sacred Heart (*Friday after second Sunday after Pentecost*): Jesus revealed to Saint Margaret Mary his Sacred Heart, wounded by sin, yet burning with love for men. He asked that men remember that he is a God of love, longing to forgive sinners. This feast

day reminds us of the loving Heart of Jesus.

Birth of John the Baptist (*June 24*): Usually a saint's feast is celebrated around the date of his death. For Saint John the Baptist we also celebrate his birth because of his special role as the herald of Jesus.

The Transfiguration (*August 6*): We commemorate the day Jesus appeared in glory on Mount Tabor.

The Assumption (*August 15*): The day Mary was taken body and soul into Heaven.

The Queenship of Mary (*August 22*): We honor Our Lady as Queen of Heaven and earth.

Beheading of Saint John the Baptist (*August 29*): We commemorate the death of John the Baptist.

Birth of Mary (*September 8*): Our Lady's birthday is celebrated because of her importance as the Mother of Jesus.

The Triumph of the Cross (*September 14*): On this day we recall that the holy Cross is the sign of our salvation.

Saints Michael, Raphael, Gabriel (*September 29*): These three archangels all are mentioned in the Sacred Scripture as powerful servants of God.

Guardian Angels (*October 2*): We honor the heavenly protector God has given to each one of us.

All Saints (*November 1*): On this day we praise God for all the saints, both those who are known to the Church, and those who are unknown.

All Souls (*November 2*): We pray for the souls in Purgatory, especially those of our family and friends who have died.

Christ the King (*last Sunday of the Church year*): We honor Jesus as King of Heaven and earth. We ask him to rule in our hearts, our homes, and our country.

Immaculate Conception (*December 8*): We

rejoice that, from the moment she began life within the womb of her mother, Mary's soul was kept free from original sin.

Christmas (*December 25*): The birth of Jesus.

Holy Family (*first Sunday after Christmas*): On this day we recall the perfect family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We ask them to help our family members to love one another and grow in holiness.