

Worship on the Web



CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS

Overview

Advent

The name comes from "advenio", the Latin for the verb "to arrive". This is a period of four weeks prior to Christmas, consisting of four Sundays. It is a time of preparation and expectancy for the story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth at Bethlehem. It usually begins in either late November or early December, on the fourth Sunday prior to Christmas Day, which may fall on any day of the week.

Christmas Day

Literally, this is the festival of "Christ's Mass". It is a celebration of the birth of Jesus. The date was fixed as 25th December around the year 323AD, nearest the shortest day of the year, and the time of an ancient Roman festival celebrating the turn of the year and the days getting longer.

Epiphany

This word literally means "manifestation", meaning "to make plain". It acknowledges the fact that Jesus of Nazareth, born as a Jew, is not only claimed by Christians to be the Son of God for Jews, but for all creation. The story of the wise men coming to the manger is associated with this day, and it begins on the 12th day of Christmas which is 6th January.

Shrove Tuesday

This is the Tuesday before Lent begins. It was associated with the tradition of confession before a period of penitence and preparation for Lent and Easter. This is where it gets its name, as those who confessed had their sins "shriven". This day is now associated with pancakes due to the tradition of abstinence from fats and extravagant food during Lent, and hence they had to be used up before the period of Lent began in a feast day. It has also been developed into other festivals in Latin American and Spanish countries, like Mardi Gras.

Ash Wednesday

This is named because of the practice of anointing the forehead of worshippers with ashes in the sign of a cross, reminding them that they were made from dust and to dust they will return. It begins the 40 days of Lent, which does not include Sundays, and, therefore, lasts 6½ weeks.

Palm Sunday

This is the Sunday immediately before Easter day associated with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. The crowds waved palm branches in welcome and expectancy.

Maundy Thursday

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and ends with Easter Saturday. Maundy Thursday derives its name from the account given in John's Gospel of Jesus' last meal with the disciples before his trial and crucifixion. The name comes from the new commandment given by Jesus at this meal with the disciples, "to love one another as I have loved you". The word "Maundy" is derived from "mandeo" meaning "to command". The story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples is associated with this statement as an acted demonstration of the commitment that Jesus expected.

Good Friday

The origin of the name Good Friday is difficult to identify. Perhaps it was a corruption of "God's Friday". It is a time where worship acknowledges the trial, suffering and death of Jesus.

Easter Saturday

In the later part of the day, the early church prepared to celebrate Easter with the baptism of new members. This is still carried on in some traditions.

Easter Day

The name is derived from an Anglo-Saxon term referring to spring. The date of Easter changes as it is fixed in relation to the lunar calendar and, therefore, may be very early in March, or late in April. The events of Easter Day are associated with the Passover, a traditional festival of the Jewish people, around which time Jesus was crucified. Easter Day is the axis of the Christian year.

Pentecost

Literally, this is 50 days after Easter, and is also associated with the Jewish tradition where there was a festival some 50 days after the Passover to celebrate the spring harvest. The Pentecost meaning 50 is associated with seven times seven, seven being an important number in Jewish tradition. Here, the church celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit to the early church and the amazing growth and development of the church touching people of a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The day of Pentecost is also known as Whitsunday in England, due to its association with baptism when those who were to be baptised wore white, and, therefore, it was called "White Sunday".

Trinity

This is a very late development of the church, a festival to remind the Church of the important doctrine of the Trinity. This is a central tenant of Christianity the God who is worshipped is Father, Son and Spirit, or Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.