

Glossary

Brief definitions of the special words associated with a Christian worship service.

Acolyte

A liturgical assistant who serves in various roles: crucifer, candle_lighter or server.

Advent

The four weeks before Christmas and the first season of the liturgical church year. The color is blue or purple.

Alb

Full-length white vestment used in worship since the sixth century. Usually worn with a cincture.

Altar

Table in the chancel used for the celebration of the Holy Communion. It is the central furnishing and focus of the worship space.

Ascension

Principal festival occurring forty days after Easter, which celebrates Christ's ascension to heaven. The color is white.

Ashes

Symbol of repentance and mortality used in the Ash Wednesday liturgy; made by burning palms from previous year's Palm Sunday procession.

Ash Wednesday

First day of Lent; occurs between February 4 and March 10. The name derives from the ancient practice of placing ashes on worshiper's foreheads. The color is black or purple.

Assisting Minister

Lay or ordained person who assists the presiding minister in worship leadership.

Banner

Fabric that is hanging in the worship space or carried in processions.

Baptism

The sacrament of water and the Holy Spirit, in which we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection and initiated into the church.

Baptismal Font

The basin which holds water for Holy Baptism.

Black

Liturgical color for Ash Wednesday; symbolizes ashes, repentance, and humiliation.

Blue

Liturgical color for Advent; symbolizes hope.

Candle

Tall light used during worship services, symbolic of Christ, the Light of the World. It may be a wax candle or a cylinder filled with special oil.

Candelabra

A fixture that holds multiple candles.

Candlelighter

A device to light and extinguish candles.

Candlestick

Ornamental base holder for candle

Chalice

Cup used for the wine in the Holy Communion.

Chancel

Elevated area in front of the nave, where altar and pulpit are located

Choir

Designated area in the worship space. The group of people who share their gifts of song.

Christ Candle

A large special candle used during Baptisms and the Easter Season,

Christ the King

Last Sunday of the church year which celebrates the kingship of Christ. The color is white.

Cincture

Rope belt worn with an alb.

Confirmation

Liturgical form of Affirmation of Baptism; marks the completion of a period of instruction in the Christian faith.

Credence

Shelf or table at chancel wall which holds sacramental vessels and offering plates.

Crucifer

Person who carries the processional cross.

Easter

Principal festival of the church year which celebrates Christ's resurrection. Easter Day, which occurs between March 22 and April 25, is known as the Resurrection of Our Lord and the color is gold or white. The Easter season lasts for fifty days. The color is white.

Easter Vigil

Liturgy on Easter Eve which includes the lighting of a new fire and procession of the paschal candle, readings from Scripture, Holy Baptism and the renewal of baptismal vows, and Holy Communion. The color is gold or white.

Elements

The earthly elements used in the celebration of the sacraments: bread and wine in Holy Communion and water in Holy Baptism.

Epiphany

Principal festival celebrated on January 6, marking the visit of the magi to Jesus and the consequent revelation of Christ to the whole world. The color is white.

Eucharist

From the Greek for "thanksgiving"; a name for the Holy Communion.

Flagon

Pitcher vessel from which wine is poured into the chalice for the Holy Communion.

Funeral Pall

Large white cloth placed on the coffin when brought into the nave for the burial liturgy.

Gold

Liturgical color for Easter Eve and Easter Day, giving special prominence to this most important festival of the year.

Good Friday

The Friday in Holy Week which observes Christ's crucifixion and death. The chancel and altar are bare of all appointments, paraments and linens.

Green

Liturgical color for non-festival seasons after Pentecost and Epiphany, symbolic of growth.

Holy Trinity

First Sunday after Pentecost, which celebrates the doctrine of the Trinity (one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The color is white.

Holy Week

The week between the Palm Sunday (Sunday of the Passion) and Easter, which recalls the events of the last days of Christ's life. The color is scarlet or purple for Sunday through Wednesday, and scarlet or white on Maundy Thursday. No paraments are used on Good Friday.

Host

Wafer, made of unleavened bread, for the Holy Communion.

Host Box

Short, round, covered container that holds additional hosts for the Holy Communion.

Intinction

From the Latin for "to dip"; the practice of administering the Eucharistic elements by dipping the bread or host into the wine.

Lectern

Reading stand in the chancel from which the Scripture lessons are read.

Lectionary

The appointed system of Scripture lessons for the days of the church year. Also refers to the book that contains these readings.

Lent

The penitential forty-day season (excluding Sundays) before Easter, beginning with Ash Wednesday. It is symbolic of Christ's forty days in the wilderness. Lent is traditionally the season when candidates prepare for Holy Baptism, which is celebrated at the Easter Vigil. The color is purple.

Linens

Refers to the three groups of white linen cloths: altar linens, Communion linens and other linens.

Liturgy

The prescribed worship service of the church.

Maundy Thursday

The Thursday in Holy Week which commemorates the institution of Holy Communion. The color is scarlet or white.

Narthex

Entrance hall of a church building. It is a place for persons to greet one another and to prepare for worship. It is also used for the formation of liturgical processions prior to the start of a worship service, wedding or funeral.

Nave

From the Latin for “ship”; the section of the church building between the narthex and the chancel, where the congregation gathers for worship.

Offertory Table

A small table near the rear of the nave which holds the bread and wine prior to the offertory.

Pall

Linen covered square placed over the rim of the chalice

Palm Sunday

The first day of Holy Week. Commemorates both Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his crucifixion. Also known as Sunday of the Passion. The color is scarlet or purple.

Paraments

Cloth hangings of various liturgical colors used to adorn the altar, pulpit and lectern.

Paschal Candle

Large white candle carried in procession during the Easter Vigil, and placed near the altar and lighted during the Easter season, symbolizing Christ’s resurrected presence. At other times of the year, it is placed at the head of the coffin for the burial liturgy.

Paten

Plate used to hold bread during the Holy Communion liturgy.

Pentecost

Principal festival of the church year, occurring fifty days after Easter. Celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit to the people gathered in Jerusalem. The color is red.

Presiding Minister

The ordained pastor who presides at a worship service

Processional Cross

A cross or crucifix on a tall staff used to lead processions.

Pulpit

Raised reading desk in the chancel from which the gospel is read and the sermon preached.

Purple

Liturgical color for Lent, symbolizing penitence. An alternate color for Advent, symbolizing the royal color for the coming King.

Red

Bright red liturgical color symbolic of the fire of the Holy Spirit. Used on the day of Pentecost, Reformation Day, martyrs' days and certain church occasions such as ordination or dedication of a church building.

Rite

The text and ceremonies of a liturgical worship service.

Sacrament

A rite commanded by Christ which uses an earthly element as a sign of God's grace. The two sacraments are Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Sanctuary

The section of the chancel which immediately surrounds the altar.

Sanctuary Lamp

A constantly burning candle suspended from the ceiling or mounted on the chancel wall.

Sign of the Cross

Gesture of tracing the outline of the cross with the hand, as a mark of belonging to Christ in Holy Baptism.

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Stole

Cloth band in liturgical color worn over the alb around a pastor's neck and hanging to the knees. Signifies ordination and the yoke of obedience to Christ.

Stripping of the Altar

Ceremony at the conclusion of Maundy Thursday liturgy, in which all appointments, linens and paraments are removed from the altar and chancel in preparation for Good Friday. Symbolic of Christ's humiliation by the soldiers.

Transfiguration

Festival celebrated on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, recalling Christ's transfiguration on the mountain. The color is white.

Veil

Cloth placed over sacramental vessels before and after the celebration of Holy Communion.

Vigil

A liturgical service on the eve of a festival, such as the Easter Vigil

White

Liturgical color used on festivals of Christ, the weeks of Christmas and Easter, The Holy Trinity and certain saints' days. Symbolizes joy, gladness, purity and the light of Christ.