

“Take my yoke upon you”: Lent and the Church Calendar

The first Sunday of Lent – March 6, 2022

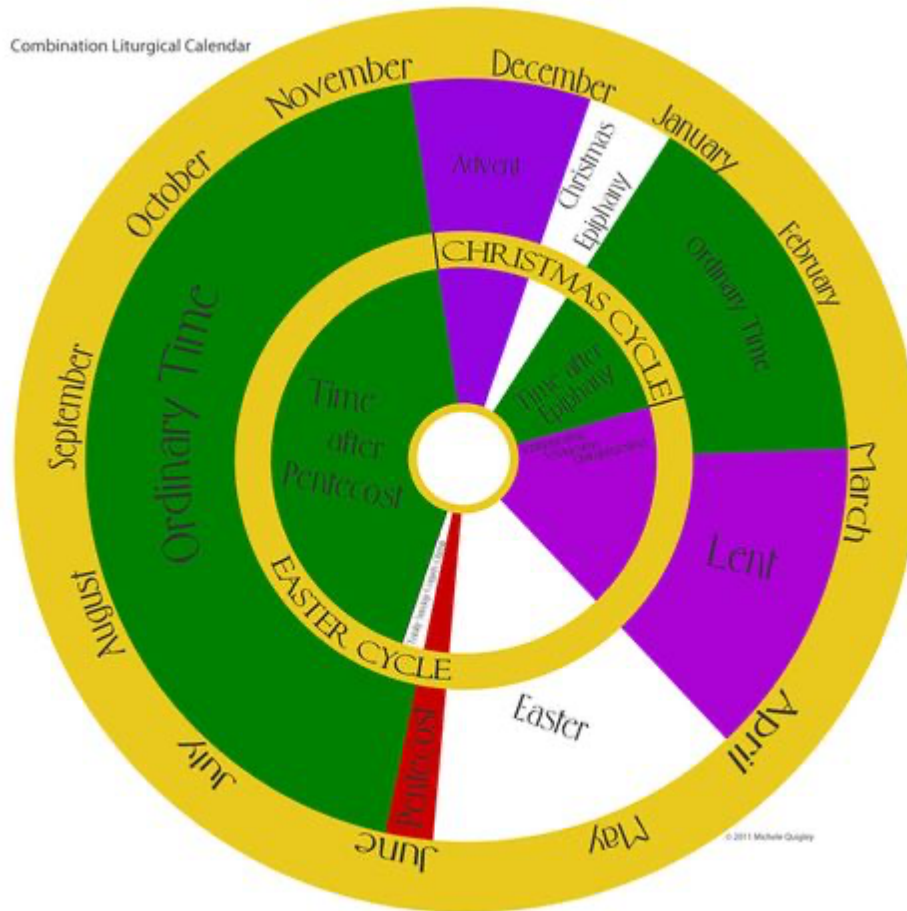
Holy Trinity Church - Tom Mount

Introduction to Lent

- Today is the first Sunday of season of Lent. Cf. Jas 4:8. “Draw near to God, and God will...” Moses and Jesus began their ministries with intense times of preparation. The early church practiced a 40-day period each year before Easter to prepare their hearts to encounter God more deeply. It involved fasting from certain pleasures and engaging in practices of prayer, Bible study, solitude, repentance and service. Lent can be the most spiritually enriching 40 days in our year, like hitting the “re-set” button.
- We will look at Lent in its larger context of the church calendar. Then we will consider Matthew 11:28-30 to better know, understand, appreciate and love this Jesus whom we worship and serve. Each week we will explain a fa

Ordering our time with the church calendar

- How do you keep time? How do you order your days, weeks and months? 1 Cor 10:31: “Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” In every compartment of our daily existence, we should think through how we might give God glory by making Jesus central.
- The early Christians wanted to keep Christ at the forefront of their consciousness. Rather than order their time around pagan feasts and imperial celebrations, they structured their time using the life of Jesus as a model. So, during the first four centuries of the Church, a calendar took shape which came to be observed by all Christians everywhere. This was centuries before the Roman Catholic Church was formed.
- In broad strokes, the church year begins with the birth of Jesus, and his presentation to the world, his baptism and ministry to his death, burial, resurrection, ascension and his sending of the Spirit. It ends with his coming again on Christ the King Sunday, before beginning all over again for another annual pilgrimage. There are two cycles in the church calendar, one in the fall, one in the spring, like the Hebrew year. The late fall Christmas cycle highlights Jesus birth, baptism and ministry. The spring Easter cycle focuses on his death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit. Look at graphic and table and note the colors.



The Christmas cycle

Advent
Christmas
Epiphany
Season of Epiphany

late Nov-Dec 25
 Dec 25-Jan 5
 Jan 6
 Jan 6-Ash Wed

Preparation for Christmas
 Incarnation of Christ
 Revelation of Christ

The Easter cycle

Lent

- Ash Wednesday
- Palm Sunday
- Good Friday
- Holy Saturday

Easter

- Easter Sunday
- Ascension

Pentecost
Season of Pentecost

- Trinity Sunday
- Christ our King Sunday

40 week-days before Easter

Sunday after full moon on/after Mar 21
 40 days after Easter
 50 days after Easter

Preparation for Easter

Resurrection of Christ

The gift of the Holy Spirit

A meditation on Jesus: Matthew 11:28-30

“²⁸ Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

- Charles Spurgeon: of the eighty-nine chapters in the four Gospels, this is the only place where Jesus tells us about his heart. Let’s walk through it phrase by phrase:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,”

- The offer is made to all those who are **“weary and burdened.”** Life can be exhausting at times. In fact, the NAS marginal rendering is: “all you who work to exhaustion.”
- The wearisome burden Jesus most has in mind is a spiritual one. Cf. Lk 11:46: the Pharisees piled rules on the people and Jesus identified with their struggles: wanting to love God and live holy lives, facing numerous temptations to sin, trying to live with integrity, compassion and grace, battling malevolent spiritual beings who attack us at our most vulnerable points. Then, to make matters worse, they had certain religious leaders who piled tons of demands on them to be acceptable to God.
- **“come to me.”** Step toward me, approach me just as you are, talk to me, tell me how you feel, draw near to me in humility and faith: that’s Step 1.

“I will give you rest.”

- **“give you rest”** is a single verb, *anapauro*: the idea of causing a person to cease from labor so they can recover their strength and be refreshed and experience quiet and calm.
- How does he give us rest? Ironically, he offers it by inviting us to wear his yoke (v. 29).

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

- A yoke was a way to ease the carrying of a heavy load. It would distribute the weight of a heavy burden over the centerline of the body.

- Jesus assumes we are all carrying a heavy load we are struggling under. He says: “Let me show you a way to carry the various responsibilities of family, work and discipleship in a hostile world that is not exhausting to your soul. Here, let me fit you with my yoke.”
- His yoke is a certain way of living a life of complete trust in God: a way of constant fellowship with the Father and the Son in the Spirit; a life of continuous prayer and worship.
- And it begins by understanding the heart of Christ: **“for I am gentle and humble in heart”**. Gentle, *praus*, means mild, tender, calm. Dane Ortland: “He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms.” Humble, *tapeinós*, means close to the ground, lowly, accessible.
- And because he is who he is, he says, **“you will find rest for your souls.”** Not your bodies always (the sabbath principle helps with this), but way down deep in the deepest part of you, you will find peace and joy and restorative delight and profound rest.

“my yoke is easy and my burden is light”

- The adjective **“easy”** here is *chrestos*, kind, considerate. Cf. Eph 4:32: “be kind to one another, tenderhearted.” His yoke is designed for human flourishing.
- When he says **“my burden is light”** he means he won’t do what the Pharisees were doing: he won’t pile us high with impossible spiritual demands.
- How do we know? Look at the way he treated people during his ministry: the lame, the lepers, the notorious “sinners.” He was gentle and humble of heart.
- Following the church calendar was seen by the early church as one way to take on ourselves Jesus’ yoke: to receive from the Father the same strength, wisdom and guidance Jesus received when he walked this path.
- My prayer is that, this Lent, each one of us draws near to the heart of Jesus in an especially meaningful way. Come to him. Trust his heart. To help you do that, be sure to pick up the special Lenten gift in the lobby.