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Video Guide

Preparing for Worship: The Liturgical Year

JohnMichael Reyes

National Community of Catechetical Leaders

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Preparing for Worship: The Liturgical Year

Insights from the Video Presentation

1. Introduction

Think about how we usually keep track of time. There are school calendars that start in the fall... And regular calendars that start on January 1st. Everything moves forward in a straight line—day after day.

Long ago, people called this Chronos, or clock time. But did you know the Church has its very own... special calendar? We call it the Liturgical Year.

Instead of a straight line, it moves in a circle, constantly bringing us back into God's story. It doesn't just count down the days. It tracks God's story!

There is another ancient word for this: Kairos, God's special time – where moments from the past become real for us today. Year after year, we walk through the life of Jesus, and it changes how we see time itself.

2. Sunday at the Center

At the center of every week is Sunday. It's not just the end of a weekend or the start of a new week - it's the Lord's Day. Why? Because it's the day Jesus rose from the dead. Every Sunday is like a mini-Easter Sunday. Each week, we gather as a family of faith and proclaim something powerful: "Jesus is alive, He loves us, and He is with us right now."

This amazing book is called the Lectionary, and it helps guide us through the Bible. God's story is so big, we can't hear it all in one year. So the Church gives us a three-year journey. Think of it like turning the page to a brand-new chapter of an epic adventure story every single year!

In Cycle A, we listen closely to the Gospel of Matthew. In Cycle B, we follow the Gospel of Mark. And in Cycle C, we walk alongside the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of John is so special, it gets sprinkled across all three years! And as we return year after year, we hear those same readings in new ways - because we've grown.

3. Advent

The liturgical calendar uses a unique color code to show us what kind of season we are in. Our adventure begins on the Church's New Year's Day: Advent. Advent is our season of waiting in joyful hope as we prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus. The color we see in churches is a deep Royal Purple... because we are getting ready for a King!

You might see in your church, school or home an Advent wreath with candles. We light the Advent wreath's candles one by one, week by week... Traditionally, three are purple, and one is Rose/pink. We light the pink one past the halfway mark... building anticipation and excitement!

4. Christmas

Then... Christmas arrives, and the colors change! White is the liturgical color of pure joy and celebration because Christmas is an entire season, not just one day! During the liturgical season of Christmas, we remember that the powerful God who made the stars became a tiny, sweet baby just to be close to us. To help us celebrate, we use two amazing symbols at home and at church.

First, there's the Christmas Tree. The tree's evergreen color is a symbol of God's love which never dies, and it reminds us of the everlasting life Jesus brings!

Second, we look at the Nativity Scene. Look closely and remember that Jesus wasn't born in a fancy palace with a soft bed. He was born in a stable, surrounded by animals! He did this to show us that He is a God for everyone - rich or poor, big or small. Every time you look at a tree or a manger, you are seeing the story of Christmas come alive!

5. Lent

After the winter chill, we enter the spring season, and before we know it Ash Wednesday arrives and we begin Lent. Lent is a 40-day journey to hit the reset button on our lives and return to God. The liturgical color turns to a reddish Purple. This reminds us to quiet our hearts through prayer, giving up things we like, and doing good deeds.

Our big symbol here is the Baptismal Font. Lent is all about getting ready to renew our Baptismal promises. Seeing the water reminds us of the day we were washed clean and chosen by God. And it also helps us remember to pray for those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil.

6. The Triduum

Right after Lent comes the Paschal Triduum. These are the three most important days of the whole liturgical year - and it is the shortest! It's like one big, three-day-long mega-celebration.

It begins on Holy Thursday, where we remember the Last Supper. Jesus washes his disciples' feet to teach us how to serve, and he gives us the beautiful gift of the Eucharist!

Next is Good Friday. The church is quiet and it's the only day when Mass is not celebrated. We look to the Cross - not with sadness, but with awe - remembering how much Jesus loves us.

Then comes Holy Saturday night... with the Easter Vigil! We gather in the dark, strike a brand-new fire, and light the Paschal candle. The Triduum ends with the greatest news ever: Jesus is alive!

7. Easter

And for fifty glorious days, we celebrate Easter! The church fills with triumphant white because... life wins! During this massive fifty-day party, we have two symbols of new life to look out for. First, there is the Paschal Candle. That candle represents Jesus Himself. Just like one tiny flame can scatter the darkness in a pitch-black room, the light of Jesus conquers every shadow of sadness, sin, and death. It reminds us that His light is always shining inside of us!

Our second symbol is actually made up of people! We call them Neophytes. (Can you say that word? Nee-o-fites.) It's an ancient word that means "new plants" or "brand-new believers." These are the people - both grown-ups and kids - who were baptized into the Church family during the beautiful Easter Vigil. Just like fresh green sprouts popping out of the ground in springtime, the Neophytes are a living sign of new life. When we look at them, we remember our own Baptism, and we celebrate that God's family is growing bigger, stronger, and more alive every single Easter!

8. Ordinary Time & Conclusion

For most of the year, the church will be dressed in greens, from forest green to emerald green. We call this Ordinary Time. But don't let the name fool you – ordinary doesn't mean boring! It just means "counted time," like numbers in a row. Green is the color of plants and leaves. It reminds us that this is our season to grow deep roots and walk side-by-side with Jesus.

Lastly, woven all through the year are the feast days of the Saints! They are our role models in heaven who show us how to follow Jesus. On their special days, the colors change! You will see white for saints who were great teachers… or Red for the martyrs. Red is the color of fire and blood! We use red to celebrate the martyrs… to remember the brave, fierce love they had for Jesus.

But Red is also the color of the Holy Spirit! We wear red on Pentecost… which is the grand finale of the Easter season. That's the day we celebrate the Holy Spirit coming down like tongues of fire upon Jesus' friends… giving them special gifts to help the Church family grow!

Every single season of the Liturgical Church calendar shapes us.

- Advent teaches us how to wait,
- Christmas brings joy,
- Lent calls us back,
- the Triduum shows us love,
- Easter fills us with life,
- and Ordinary Time helps us grow.

So here's your challenge: when you walk into Church this Sunday, pay attention. Look closely for the hidden signs of the season:

- What color is the priest wearing today?
- What special symbols do you see near the altar? Is it a glowing candle? Fresh green branches? Sparkling water?

And most importantly - listen. What is God saying to your heart?

Because the liturgical year isn't just something we observe - it's something we live.
It's an adventure. And it's one we walk together.

Preparing Children for the Liturgical Year: Strategies

The liturgical year gives shape and rhythm to Catholic life, but its seasons, colors, and observances can feel abstract to children unless they're helped to notice and live them. The liturgical year is meant to be lived, not just learned — it shapes how Catholics experience time itself as sacred, cyclical, and centered on the life of Christ. When children come to recognize the colors, rhythms, and stories of each season, the year stops feeling like a list of holidays and starts feeling like a story they are truly part of.

1. Teach the Big Picture First

Children engage more meaningfully with each season once they understand how it fits into the whole yearly story.

- Introduce the liturgical year as the story of Jesus's life told again and again, season by season — waiting, arrival, growth, suffering, victory, and mission.
- Use a simple circular calendar or wheel showing the seasons in order (Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, Easter, Ordinary Time) so children see the whole shape, not just isolated events.
- Revisit the wheel throughout the year, marking where you currently are, so the concept builds over time rather than being taught once and forgotten.

2. Use Color to Build Recognition

Color is one of the most concrete, memorable ways children can track the liturgical year. Have children color a liturgical calendar, decorate a classroom banner, or check the priest's vestment color when they attend Mass to reinforce the pattern.

- *Purple* for Advent and Lent (waiting and preparation)
- *White or Gold* for Christmas and Easter (joy and celebration)
- *Green* for Ordinary Time (growth)
- *Red* for Pentecost and feasts of martyrs (the Holy Spirit, sacrifice)

3. Mark Advent with Anticipation, Not Just Countdown

Advent is a season of waiting and hope — helping children feel that anticipation matters more than simply marking days off a calendar.

- Use an Advent wreath in the classroom, lighting a candle each week and discussing its meaning (hope, peace, joy, love).
- Create a Jesse Tree, adding a symbol each day tied to a Scripture story leading up to Jesus's birth.
- Avoid rushing to Christmas carols and decorations too early — let Advent's quieter, expectant mood have its own space.

4. Extend Christmas Beyond December 25th

Children often assume Christmas ends the day after presents are opened — helping them see the fuller season deepens their understanding.

- Teach that the Christmas season continues through the Baptism of the Lord, and includes feasts like Epiphany (the visit of the Magi) and the Holy Family.
- Keep a Nativity scene displayed and discussed in the classroom throughout the season, not just as December decor.
- Highlight the Epiphany with a small class activity — a "star hunt" or gift-giving theme connected to the Magi's visit.

5. Make Lent Tangible and Personal

Lent's themes of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving become real for children when tied to concrete practices, not abstract ideas.

- Help children choose an age-appropriate practice for each pillar of Lent: something to pray more, something to give up (fasting), and something to give or do for others (almsgiving).
- Use a simple Lenten calendar or chain to track daily practices or good deeds, giving children something tangible to mark progress.
- Walk through the Stations of the Cross together, using child-friendly language and, if possible, movement from station to station.

6. Help Children Enter Holy Week

Holy Week's dramatic shifts — celebration, betrayal, suffering, silence, joy — can be confusing without preparation, but powerful with it.

- Walk through the arc of the week in simple terms: Palm Sunday's celebration, Holy Thursday's Last Supper and washing of feet, Good Friday's suffering, Holy Saturday's waiting, and Easter's joy.
- Let children wave palm branches, reenact the washing of feet, or observe a moment of silence to feel the emotional shifts of the week, not just hear about them.
- Talk explicitly about the quiet, unfinished feeling of Holy Saturday — waiting without knowing what comes next — as its own important moment, not just a pause before Easter.

7. Celebrate the Fifty Days of Easter

Easter is the Church's longest and most joyful season — helping children experience its full fifty days deepens their sense of its importance.

- Keep an "Alleluia" banner or symbol displayed throughout the Easter season as a visual reminder that the celebration continues well past Easter Sunday.
- Mark Pentecost as the dramatic "finale" of the Easter season — use red decorations, wind and fire imagery, and a class activity around the Holy Spirit's gifts.
- Revisit Resurrection stories throughout the season rather than only on Easter Sunday itself.

8. Help Children Notice Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time can feel uneventful to children, but it's an opportunity to teach that faith isn't only lived in "big moments."

- Explain that "ordinary" refers to counted/ordered weeks, not unimportant ones — this is the season of everyday growth in faith.
- Use Ordinary Time to focus on the person and teachings of Jesus through His public ministry — parables, miracles, and teachings — rather than a specific mystery of His life.
- Highlight saints' feast days that fall during Ordinary Time to keep the season feeling alive and connected to real lives of faith.

9. Use a Consistent Visual and Sensory Anchor

A repeated classroom ritual tied to the season builds long-term recognition better than a single lesson.

- Keep a seasonal prayer table or corner in the classroom, updating its cloth color, symbols, and objects with each new season.
- Open or close each class with a brief, consistent nod to the current season (a color, a phrase, a song) so children track the calendar across the whole year, not just during special lessons.

10. Connect the Seasons to the Children's Own Lives

Children internalize the liturgical year more deeply when it connects to their own experiences of waiting, celebrating, and growing.

- Ask reflective questions tied to each season: "What are you waiting for right now?" (Advent), "What is hard for you to give up?" (Lent), "What brings you joy?" (Easter).
- Connect each season's themes to the children's own rhythms — the start of school, the changing seasons of nature, birthdays, and family celebrations — to help sacred time feel connected to their lived experience, not separate from it.

Preparing Adolescents for the Liturgical Year: Strategies

Adolescents are capable of engaging the liturgical year at a much deeper level than simple recognition of colors and holidays — they're ready to wrestle with what waiting, sacrifice, suffering, and hope actually cost and mean. When the liturgical seasons are connected honestly to teens' own experiences of uncertainty, growth, and searching for identity, the Church's calendar stops being background scenery and becomes a real companion for navigating adolescence itself.

1. Reframe the Year as a Story They're Living, Not Just Watching

Teens disengage from content that feels like it's only about the past — the liturgical year lands differently when framed as their own unfolding story.

- Introduce (or revisit) the liturgical year not as a calendar of holidays, but as the Church's way of walking through the life of Christ every year — and by extension, walking through their own life of faith on repeat, each year a little differently.
- Ask directly: "Which season do you feel like you're in right now — waiting, celebrating, struggling, or growing? Why?" and let the liturgical calendar become a lens for their actual life.

2. Advent: Sit with Real Waiting, Not Just Countdown

Teens are often more familiar with waiting and uncertainty than they let on — Advent offers real language for that experience.

- Discuss what teens are actually waiting for in their own lives right now — a decision, an acceptance letter, a relationship, clarity about the future — and connect it to the tension of Advent's "not yet."
- Introduce the concept of active waiting versus passive waiting — Mary and Joseph didn't just sit still; they prepared, traveled, and trusted. Ask: "What does it look like for you to wait well?"
- Avoid rushing past Advent's discomfort into Christmas cheer too quickly — let teens sit with the season's honest tension.

3. Christmas: Move Past Nostalgia into Incarnation

Teens can experience Christmas mostly through family tradition and nostalgia — helping them re-encounter its theological weight matters.

- Explore the scandal and strangeness of the Incarnation directly: God becoming a vulnerable, dependent infant, born to unmarried teenage parents, in a marginalized situation. Ask: "Why would God choose to enter the world this way?"
- Connect the season to their own sense of being "known" and "seen" — the idea that God chose to become fully human, fully present, not distant.

4. Lent: Frame Sacrifice as Freedom, Not Just Deprivation

Teens often reduce Lent to "giving something up" without connecting it to deeper spiritual freedom — reframing this can shift the whole season.

- Discuss the three pillars of Lent — prayer, fasting, almsgiving — as tools for spiritual freedom, not punishment, and invite teens to choose practices tied to something they genuinely want to grow in.
- Introduce the idea of "desert time" — Jesus's forty days facing temptation — and ask where teens experience their own "deserts" (isolation, temptation, doubt) and what it might mean to face them with God rather than alone.
- Walk the Stations of the Cross together, but invite teens to identify which station resonates most with something in their own life right now.

5. Holy Week: Let the Full Emotional Arc Land

Holy Week's dramatic shifts — celebration, betrayal, suffering, silence, joy — mirror real emotional territory teens are already navigating.

- Use real art, music, or film clips depicting the Passion to let the emotional weight of the week land.
- Walk through the week's emotional arc explicitly: the crowd's praise turning to betrayal (Palm Sunday), intimate love and impending loss (Holy Thursday), abandonment and suffering (Good Friday), unresolved waiting (Holy Saturday), and unexpected joy (Easter).
- Discuss Holy Saturday specifically as a model for sitting with grief, doubt, or unresolved pain without rushing to a resolution — ask: "Have you ever had a 'Holy Saturday' moment, where you didn't know how things would turn out?"

6. Easter: Explore the Cost and Reality of Hope

Teens can be skeptical of hope that feels naive — Easter's hope is worth presenting as something earned through real suffering, not denial of it.

- Discuss the Resurrection as hope that comes only after real suffering and loss, not a bypass around it — distinguishing Christian hope from simple optimism.
- Invite teens to identify an area of their own life where they need resurrection hope — something that feels dead or hopeless — and discuss what trusting in new life might look like there.
- Mark Pentecost as a turning point toward mission: the disciples move from fear to bold action. Ask teens: "What might the Holy Spirit be sending you to do, now that you're older?"

7. Ordinary Time: Find Meaning in the Unremarkable

Teens often equate meaning with intensity or drama — Ordinary Time offers a needed counter-message about faithfulness in daily life.

- Explicitly name that most of life — and faith — happens in Ordinary Time, not in dramatic spiritual highs, and discuss why consistency and small, faithful choices matter more than intensity.
- Use Ordinary Time to explore Jesus's public ministry and teachings in depth — parables, miracles, interactions with real people — tying His ordinary, everyday encounters to how teens might notice God in their own ordinary days.
- Highlight saints whose feast days fall in Ordinary Time, especially those who lived unremarkable circumstances with extraordinary faith, as models for teens navigating their lives.

8. Build in Personal Reflection, Not Just Instruction

Teens engage more deeply with content they've processed personally, rather than simply presented.

- Offer a reflection journal or prompt tied to each season ("What am I waiting for?" "What do I need to let go of?" "Where do I need resurrection?") that teens can return to across the year.
- Give teens the option to respond creatively — art, music, writing — to a season's themes rather than always through discussion alone.

9. Use Visual and Sensory Anchors Consistently

Even older teens benefit from consistent, tangible markers of the liturgical year.

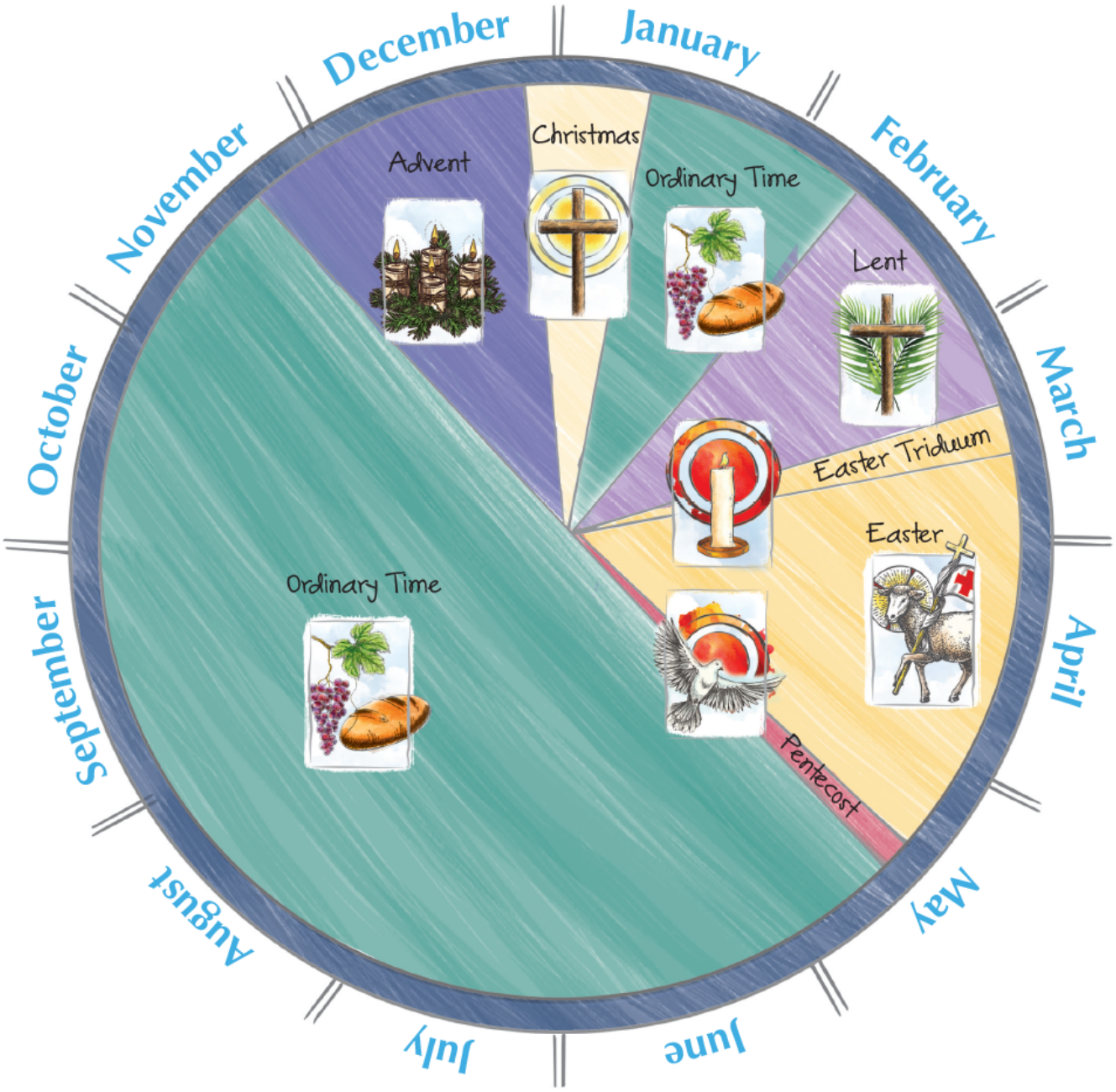
- Keep a seasonal prayer space in the classroom or youth space, updating colors and symbols with each season, and let teens take turns setting it up.
- Note the liturgical color and season briefly at the start of each session, building an ongoing, low-effort awareness of where the Church — and they — are in the year.

10. Connect the Calendar to Their Own Milestones

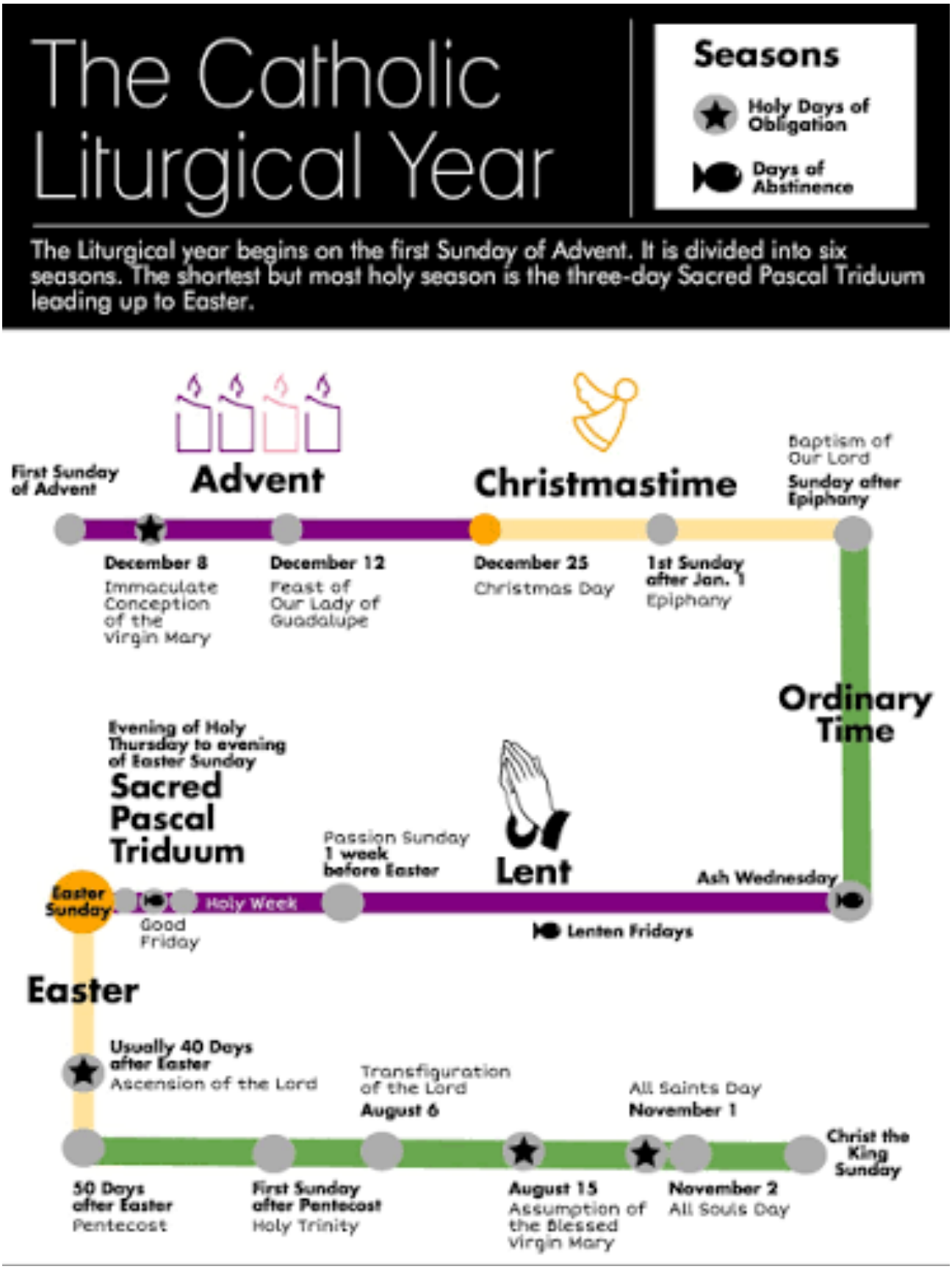
Teens are moving through their own major life transitions — the liturgical year can become a companion to that journey, not a separate structure imposed on it.

- Explicitly connect liturgical seasons to major transitions in a teen's life — starting or finishing school years, Confirmation, decisions about the future — helping them see the Church's calendar as walking alongside their own story, not running on a separate track.
- Encourage teens to identify their own "liturgical year" — their own seasons of waiting, struggle, celebration, growth — and notice how those personal seasons might echo the Church's rhythm.

The Liturgical Year Calendar



The Liturgical Year Seasons



The Liturgical Year: Three-Year Lectionary Cycle

The Catholic Sunday lectionary runs on a three-year rotation — Year A, Year B, and Year C — with each year built around one of the three "Synoptic" Gospels. The Gospel of John doesn't get its own year; instead, it's woven into all three years, especially during Lent, Easter, Advent, and Christmas. Here's how each year shapes the story:

Year A - Gospel of Matthew

Matthew presents Jesus primarily as the fulfillment of Hebrew Scripture — the new Moses, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. It's the most structured and "teacherly" of the Gospels, organized around five big blocks of teaching (the Sermon on the Mount being the most famous). Matthew emphasizes Jesus as king and lawgiver, quotes the Old Testament constantly to show prophecy being fulfilled, and pays special attention to the Church and community life — questions like "how do we live together as the Body of Christ" show up a lot.

Year B - Gospel of Mark

Mark is the shortest, fastest-paced, and most urgent of the Gospels — full of the word "immediately." Because Mark is so short, Year B borrows from John's Gospel to fill gaps, most notably the "Bread of Life" discourse (John 6) is read over several Sundays in the summer of Year B instead of a Marcan parallel. Mark's Jesus is active, often mysterious, frequently misunderstood even by his own disciples, and the Gospel builds tension toward the cross — the "Messianic secret" and the difficulty of truly recognizing who Jesus is are central themes.

Year C - Gospel of Luke

Luke tends to emphasize compassion, mercy, and Jesus' concern for the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized. It has the most parables unique to it (the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan), a strong focus on prayer, and a Jesus who is deeply human and relational. Luke also frames the Gospel within a bigger historical sweep — it's part of a two-volume work continued in Acts of the Apostles, so there's a strong sense of the Holy Spirit and the Church's mission stretching outward.

Gospel of John

John is present in every year Rather than getting a "year," John's Gospel shows up seasonally across all three years: heavily during Lent (especially the great "signs" chapters — the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, the raising of Lazarus, especially in the RCIA-oriented readings), throughout the Easter season, and for the Christmas/Advent prologue ("In the beginning was the Word..."). John's portrait of Jesus is the most explicitly divine and reflective — long theological discourses, "I AM" statements, and an emphasis on Jesus' oneness with the Father.

Taken together, the cycle is designed so that over three years, a regular Mass-goer hears nearly the entire Gospel story told from four different angles — Jesus as king and teacher (Matthew), urgent and active (Mark), merciful and inclusive (Luke), and divine and revelatory (John) — rather than just once straight through.

The Liturgical Year: Children's Introduction to the Three-Year Lectionary Cycle

The Catholic Church reads the story of Jesus in a **three-year circle** called Cycles A, B, and C. Each year focuses on a different friend of Jesus who wrote down His life story.

Year A: Matthew ➔ Year B: Mark ➔ Year C: Luke ➔ John is read every year!

Year A: Gospel of Matthew – Jesus the Great Teacher

Matthew shows Jesus as a wise teacher and a kingly guide.

- **The Big Picture:** Jesus builds the Church like a beautiful kingdom.
- **Special Moments:** We hear the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus gives us the Beatitudes.
- **The Image:** Think of Jesus sitting on a hillside, teaching crowds how to love one another.

Year B: Gospel of Mark – Jesus the Worker of Miracles

Mark writes the shortest story, full of action and quick movement.

- **The Big Picture:** Jesus is a man of action who helps people right away.
- **Special Moments:** Jesus calms big storms, heals the sick, and walks on water.
- **The Image:** Think of Jesus rushing to help someone, showing God's power through miracles.

Year C: Gospel of Luke – Jesus the Compassionate Prophet and Healer

Luke focuses on the big heart of Jesus and His love for everyone.

- **The Big Picture:** Jesus cares deeply for the poor, the lonely, and the outsiders.
- **Special Moments:** We hear the famous stories of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.
- **The Image:** Think of Jesus welcoming children, smiling, and forgiving people with open arms.

The Gospel of John

John does not get his own year because his story is extra special.

- **When we hear it:** Every single year during Christmas, Easter, and special holy weeks.
- **The Big Picture:** John shows that Jesus is the Light of the World and the Son of God.