

Circle of the Church Year

Adapted from the Godly Play story by Jerome Berryman – Amended to add additional feast days

Props and Equipment

Portable mic for the storyteller

Ideally, dress the storyteller in white vestments.

Approximately 6 foot length of rope.

You will need 52 colour visuals apportioned this way:

1 red

4 blue

6 purple

9 white

32 green

In the accompanying video, we used air filled balloons attached to ¼ inch by 36 inch wood dowel rods. We made a supporting base using a solo cup glued to a plastic plate. In other churches, we've used helium balloons (be aware of loft or float time – you don't want them to droop before you present). In another church, we used people wearing coloured Hawaiian leis and moved them into position. A colleague of mine had people hold coloured pieces of construction paper.

Optional Props and Equipment

In this video, we included optional elements. A person dressed in red and a person dressed in white. We used clergy vestments to dress them. To indicate Palm Sunday, we also used a toy plush donkey.

Script

As you speak, first lay out the rope in a line. Next, as you mention a circle, pull the ends of the rope to join and shift the rope's layout to form a circle.

Time, time, time. One way to think about time is as one long, continuous line that has a beginning and then a middle and then an end. This is sometimes called a timeline as you think chronologically about events throughout history.

But the church takes that timeline and takes what's at the end and puts it at the beginning and forms it into a circle and thinks about time as a circle.

That indeed is how we structure the church year. We walk around and around through a circle of seasons.

Now that circle of seasons has a few anchor points. Three great Mysteries and these three mysteries are Easter, Pentecost – you've got to be careful at Pentecost -- it's a bit hot, and also Christmas. Three great mysteries.

As you speak, place a white visual for Easter, a red visual for Pentecost, and a white visual for Christmas into place.

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We'll move Easter, perhaps the greatest of the Mysteries here, and Pentecost well it's a little further over. We'll put Pentecost, that great mystery, over here. Then Christmas. If we were to think about Christmas the way secular society thinks about Christmas, we might be tempted to think that it is the greatest mystery of all. But it's probably the lesser of the three and indeed for nearly 400 years the Church didn't even keep Christmas. We only began to keep Christmas when we felt a need to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. And so we began to celebrate his birth.

We have three great Mysteries: Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and we find that to get ready for these great Mysteries we need seasons for getting ready.

As you discuss Advent, add the four blue visuals.

Christmas has a season for getting ready. We call that season Advent. Now for a time, Advent was kept as a purple season as it was thought to be a penitential season. Yet in the last century or so many churches have shifted and keep Advent as a blue colour. Still a royal colour thinking of the kingship of Jesus but also a time when we think about John the Baptist. We think about the prophets. We think about Mary and we also imagine how Christ will come again. A season of anticipation. Somehow we get ready for the first time that Jesus came by imagining how he will one day come again with power and glory and might.

As you discuss Lent, add the six purple visuals.

Easter has a longer season for getting ready. A season we call Lent and it is an austere season. It is a time of penitence and self-reflection. Because Easter is a bigger mystery we take six whole weeks to prepare for the mystery of Easter. We always start the season of Lent with remembering Jesus's own Temptation in the wilderness and how he spent 40 days in the wilderness fasting. We too spend 40 days from Ash Wednesday until Easter Day getting ready.

40 days for the season of Lent. Sometimes people mark this season with personal fasting -- giving up something for Lent is a common devotional practice. Lent is a holy season that is six weeks long -- long enough for getting ready for the mystery of Easter.

Now one of the things we find about these great Mysteries is that they are so big and so expansive well, they spill over into other days. You need a whole season to keep Easter. So Easter continues for a great 50 days. 50 days from Easter Day until the Day of Pentecost.

Add the six white visuals to represent the Season of Easter.

This is a time of year when we read from the Book of Acts. We hear about the forming of the early church and how it grew under the leadership of people like the disciples. Disciples like Peter and new followers of Jesus -- people like St Paul. The Mystery of Easter spills across six weeks. We hear about the Ascension of Jesus up into heaven. Of how God goes up. And then we get to Pentecost where God in the form of a rushing wind and tongues of fire comes down and inspires the disciples and pushes them out into the world. We discover that the mystery of Easter cannot be contained to some upper room but that it is unleashed out into the world.

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As a white visual to capture the Feast of Epiphany.

Similarly, the Season of Christmas can't be contained in just one day. It spills over too. There's a Sunday after Christmas and then the Feast of the Epiphany where we mark how the wise men, the Magi from the East, came to greet the Christ Child. We move from the Feast of the Epiphany to what we call the Season of Epiphany. And that's when we have days that mark the early days in Christ's ministry. Events like the Baptism of Christ.

Because Easter is a day that moves the Season of Epiphany can be very short or it can be kind of average, and some years, like last year, was very short and other years can be much longer. The longest the Season of Epiphany can ever be is nine weeks long so we'll put nine Sundays here.

Add nine green visuals to form the Season of Epiphany.

We sometimes call these green days the green and growing days of the church year. Sometimes we call them ordinary time. (Until last year I thought ordinary meant well they're kind of regular default Sundays it's ordinary time. I was corrected. Ordinary comes from ordinal numbers like 1 2 3 4) This is when we get days that are marked by first Sunday after Epiphany, Second Sunday after Epiphany, and so on.

So at this stage, we have about half of the church year marked by the mysteries of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Seasons of getting ready and seasons that spill over. But what about that rest of the year? The whole other half?

Those are green and growing days as well and with complete creativity the church calls them, *the Sundays after Pentecost*. And it's weeks and weeks and weeks. Sometimes as many as 20 or more Sundays that are the green and growing days of the church year.

Begin adding the remaining green visuals as you speak. This is the most time consuming part of the visual layout.

This is the time when we hear about the ministry of Jesus. His teaching and healing and how he ministered to the people. He was mostly in the North of Israel in the province known as Galilee. He would move around the Sea of Galilee to various villages and the crowds would follow him bringing their sick to him for healing. They would sit with him for things like The Sermon on the Mount to hear his great wisdom and teaching.

These green and growing days also align pretty closely, at least in the northern hemisphere, with our growing season. Around the time of Pentecost, we are preparing our gardens and farmers are preparing their fields. That time of planting and growing takes us into the summer months when often we have times of holiday. For students times of rest and refreshment. These are the days when we try to get out of town and when we grow and change as well. The season continues on through the summer to that time when we go back to school. That time when we celebrate the Harvest. When we celebrate events like Halloween. We continue through this green and growing season continuing to hear about the life of

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Jesus and it continues on and on. Nearly half of the year is spent in these green and growing days. They take us around the circle through the month of November and these green and growing days take us right up to the beginning of Advent where the old church year comes to an end and the new church year begins.

Time, time, time. Time can be kept in a line with a beginning and a middle and an end. Time can also be kept in a circle. These are the seasons of the church year. The season of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and the season after Pentecost.

You may wish to end the story here if saints' days are not a part of your tradition. If you wish to proceed, you may need to amend the text below to fit holy days you do keep.

Within this liturgical circle we also keep holy days and for this I need an assistant. You may have heard the term *red letter day* and that comes from how we mark on calendars these holy days. Sometimes in red and sometimes in white.

Invite the person dressed in red to stand between the last green visual and the first blue visual.

Now I'm going to take Saint Andrew here and move him to his feast day. Poor Saint Andrew. Unless your church is named after Saint Andrew, this feast day of Reign of Christ bumps Saint Andrew and he's almost never kept on a Sunday. His holy day is November the 30th right over here. But November the 30th as it falls in the church year is either Reign of Christ or the first Sunday in Advent and they always bump poor Andrew off the calendar.

Position the person dressed in white alongside the person in red.

Today I'm in white for Reign of Christ, a holy day within the season of Pentecost. I'm sort of here, bumping Saint Andrew out of the way.

Move about the last third of the green visuals.

There are other saints' days and other holy days through the year. At the beginning of November there's All Saints Day and All Souls Day. A time of year when we remember those we love but see no longer. You might recall that earlier in the fall we kept St Luke's Day -- also a red letter day sort of about here on October the 18th. You may wonder why do some saints get red and other saints get white? Because at the beginning of October when we kept Saint Francis he got white. Well it basically comes down to how did your saint die? If your saint was martyred they get red. If your saint died a more natural death he or she gets white. When you think about the saints, the earlier saints lived closer to the time of Jesus. The disciples in particular -- they almost always get red because they lived and expanded the life of the church in a time of great persecution and so martyrdom then was really quite common.

We've kept other holy days in our church year. In the summer, you might recall in the middle of July we kept Saint Mary Magdalene. She was one of those disciples, one of those early saints who managed to escape martyrdom and so her holy day is white. Another saint's day that we routinely keep is Saint Augustine of Canterbury. His day is in the middle of May much closer to Pentecost. Very often Saint

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Augustine of Canterbury's day falls in the Season of Easter. We are named after Saint Augustine of Canterbury because the first Eucharist that the community here ever celebrated together was celebrated on the Sunday nearest the Feast Day of St Augustine of Canterbury. The community had begun to gather at the end of April. April 28th, 1946. But they didn't have a priest when they first gathered. They were led by a student and then a visiting priest came in the middle of May and they had their first Eucharist. When the bishop decided to form a congregation that would become us, he decided to name that new congregation after the nearest feast day for St Augustine of Canterbury.

As you speak, invite the person dressed in red to stand between the last purple visual and the first white visual.

We also have other holy days, almost miniature seasons within themselves and one falls right here and I would invite Saint Andrew to come and be a different red holy day. (I think I lost my donkey he was right over by the font... oh we have him, excellent) So come with your donkey and be between the purple and the white. Within the purple and the white you have a very short season sometimes called Passiontide if you keep it for two weeks or Holy Week if it's kept for just one week. And the signal that Holy Week has begun is Palm Sunday when Jesus comes into Jerusalem riding, not on a warhorse, but on a beast of burden. On a donkey. That day is kept as red. In some more elaborate places, places like cathedrals, they might have a set of colours that are sort of red mixed with a purple or black colour to keep Passiontide.

Good Friday falls within that week and some places don't use any colour at all or perhaps use black to mark that deep and holy day within the church year.

So there can be miniature seasons and holy days within the big seasons of the church year.

Return to centre.

Time, time, time. You can think about time as a line with a beginning and then a middle and somewhere down the way an end. Or you can take that ending and that beginning, as Jesus liked to say, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end and they can meet and form a circle.

The church year moves through that circle keeping time. Anchored in the great Mysteries of the church year and the great mysteries and moments of Christ's life death and resurrection.

For this we give thanks. Amen.