

Welcome to the Church Year – Discussion Questions

Welcome to the Church Year

1. How do you mark the passing of time and seasons in your family? What traditions do you keep year after year? Why? How did they develop and change over time?
2. What memories do you have of keeping the feasts and fasts of the church year as a child? If you were raised in another religious faith, what traditions did you keep every year? What traditions from your childhood would you like to pass on to your children and grandchildren?
3. Locate a copy of Lesser Feasts and Fasts and look through the calendar of saints. What names do you recognize? Are there names that surprise you? Find the saint for your birthday—or a saint you would like to know more about—and read his or her biography and collect.
4. Turn to the Lectionary in The Book of Common Prayer, beginning on page 888. Look through the propers listed for the Sundays in Years A, B, and C. What feast days do you recognize? Select a particular Sunday and compare the readings for each year. What themes do you see?

Advent

1. Think about the times in your life when you have had to wait for something or for someone. How did it feel to wait? What was particularly difficult about waiting patiently? Did you find you could wait with hopeful expectation? What helped you pass the time?
2. What Advent traditions have you kept in your family? What traditions would you like to incorporate into your family life this year?
3. How has your understanding of Advent changed over the years?
4. Locate a copy of The Book of Occasional Services and turn to the Seasonal Blessings, beginning on page 22. Read the blessings for Advent. What Advent themes do you hear?
5. Think about the three biblical figures who are featured prominently in Advent—the prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Mary the mother of Jesus. What do you know about them? What questions do you have about who they were and what they did?

Christmas

1. What memories do you have of Christmas as a child? What traditions are most meaningful in your family now? How do they relate to Christmas as a Christian feast day?
2. How do you feel about the early church's practice of "adopting" the celebrations of other religious traditions and making them Christian feast days? Can you think of ways the church continues to give Christian meanings to secular or national holidays today?
3. Have you ever kept the Twelve Days of Christmas? If so, how? What traditions could you incorporate into your family life this year that would help you celebrate the entire Christmas season?
4. Locate a copy of The Hymnal 1982 and look at the section for Christmas (hymns 77–115). Choose one or two of your favorite Christmas hymns and describe why you find them particularly meaningful.
5. The feast of the Holy Name is one of the Twelve Days of Christmas. Do you know how and why your parents chose your name? Do you think your name fits you? What does your name tell others about you?

The Epiphany

1. What Epiphany traditions do you keep every year (if any)?
What traditions would you like to introduce into your family life now?
2. Jesus' baptism was a pivotal moment in his life and a "manifestation" of his identity as God's Son. If you are preparing for baptism now, how do you anticipate your baptism will affect your identity? If you were baptized as a child or adult, what do you remember about your own baptism? If you were baptized as an infant, have you heard stories about the event from your parents or godparents? How has your baptism affected who you are?
3. Think about times in your life when you have come to "see" differently, as if some previously hidden truth has been revealed to you. What led to that moment of transfiguration or manifestation? How did your life change because of it?

4. What do you think it means when Christians proclaim Jesus Christ to be the “light of the world”?
5. Read and reflect on the Epiphany blessings quoted in this chapter or found in *The Book of Occasional Services*, page 24. What Epiphany themes do you hear?

Lent

1. What Lenten traditions do you remember from your childhood, if any? How has your understanding of Lent changed over time?
2. What Lenten disciplines have you or members of your family undertaken in recent years, if any? Are there different or additional spiritual disciplines you are considering for next Lent?
3. The early church developed the catechumenate as a way of preparing candidates for baptism. What topics do you think need to be discussed in baptismal preparation classes today?
4. Ash Wednesday is a difficult service for many people, who find it sobering to reflect on human mortality. Why do you think the church begins Lent in this way? Do you find the service a helpful way to start the Lenten season? Why or why not?
5. Read and reflect on the various Prayers over the People for Lent found in *The Book of Occasional Services*, pages 25 and 26. What Lenten themes do you hear?

Holy Week

1. What are some of your most memorable moments during Holy Week in the past?
2. If you, like Egeria, were writing to a friend about Holy Week in the Episcopal Church today, how would you describe the events of this special week in your congregation?
3. If you have heard or participated in the reading of the passion gospel on Palm Sunday or Good Friday in previous years, how has it affected your understanding of the gospel? Why do you think the early church found it important to read the passion gospel over and over again in Holy Week?
4. If you have participated in the footwashing on Maundy Thursday in previous years, what was your experience like? If you have not, would you like to try it now? Why or why not?
5. One of the prayers you will hear often during Holy Week is the prayer that begins, “Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family. . . .” The entire text of the prayer can be found at the beginning of the Good Friday liturgy (BCP 276). As you read this prayer again, reflect on what it means to be a member of God’s “family.”

Easter to Pentecost

1. What Easter traditions do you remember keeping as a child? What traditions have you chosen to pass on to your children and grandchildren? Why?
2. Christians have long kept Easter not merely as a celebration of Jesus’ resurrection at a certain point in human history, but as a celebration of new life in the present moment. Where do you see glimpses of the power of God’s life overcoming death in the world today? In your own life?
3. Read the Exsultet, found on pages 286 and 287 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. What Easter themes do you hear? How does this text affect your understanding of the meaning of Easter?
4. How do you understand Jesus’ ascension?
5. In what ways do you perceive the Holy Spirit is alive and active in the church today? In the world? In your life?

The Season after Pentecost

1. What is the usual schedule of your days in the weeks the church sometimes calls “Ordinary Time”? How do you give expression to your faith during this time of the year?
2. How would you explain the doctrine of the Trinity to someone who is unfamiliar with it? What is the most difficult aspect of the Trinity for you to communicate? Why?
3. Reread the well-known passage from C. S. Lewis’s sermon “The Weight of Glory” quoted above in the section on the Transfiguration. In what ways do his words change your view of the people with whom you live, work, worship, or simply meet on the street? How do you imagine you will interact differently with them now?

4. The image of Christ the king is one that conveys different associations for many people in the church. In what ways do the readings for that Sunday help us understand this complex image? What helpful meanings does the image convey for you?