

## **Topic**

### ● I INTRODUCTION

- A **We must always remember that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is our faith**
  - 1 Faith is our experience of His saving power in our hearts and in our lives
  - 2 And it is the response His presence invites from us
    - a **Individually**
    - b **And as a community**
- B **But the love we are offered in Jesus is infinitely rich**
  - 1 It is too rich to be experienced in one view or statement
  - 2 That's why each of the Gospels provides a varied view of Jesus' ministry
    - a He feeds and preaches
    - b He cleanses and teaches
    - c He heals and forgives
    - d He offers compassion and companionship
    - e He calls and sends
- C **Each time the Church gathers, we celebrate the presence of Jesus**
  - 1 But if we simply celebrate His presence in our midst
    - a We'll miss many separate meanings to this presence
    - b Especially will we overlook the meanings that are experienced by others in the Church
    - c We need to go beyond celebrating His presence; we need to experience this presence
      - (1) Creating and deepening community
      - (2) Commissioning us for service
  - 2 We need to experience as many as possible of the different facets of Jesus acting within us
  - 3 **Therefore, each Sunday (and weekday) we use selections from the Bible**
    - a **To help us focus on the various experiences and expressions of our God**
    - b **And to challenge us to new responses to these experiences**
- D **There is a basic organization to the Scripture readings used in our services**
  - 1 There are two **specific seasons of the year**
    - a **Christmas: the entrance of Jesus and His love into our world and into our lives**
    - b **Easter: the victory of Jesus and His love over all the forces within and without that would restrain or destroy this love**
  - 2 There is one general season covering the remaining weeks
- E **Christmas and Easter are each set by a yearly calendar**
  - 1 **Christmas**
    - a Christmas is set by the "solar calendar"
      - (1) **The way it is set explains why it always falls on the same date**
      - (2) Surprisingly to us, this celebration began late in Christian history
      - (3) The early Christians were too practical to attend to something as academic as when Jesus was born
    - b No Biblical story or early Tradition offers any hints regarding what day, month, or year Jesus was born
    - c The date was set in Rome centuries after Jesus was born – set for a practical reason
      - (1) The date picked coincided with a favorite Roman pagan festival, "**Saturnalia**"
        - (a) It was a week of celebration
        - (b) The festival celebrated the victory of light over darkness beginning on December 17
          - [1] It occurred around the shortest day of the year

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- [2] The days soon began growing longer; light was conquering darkness
- (2) Christian converts needed their own celebration during this time or they might revert to the worship of Saturn
- (3) The converts were offered the birth of Jesus, Christmas as a substitute feast
- d The date poses a difficulty for us: the shortest day of the year is December 20/21
  - (1) At the time Christmas was set for December 25, it was the day after the shortest day of the year
  - (2) The Romans were using the Julian calendar established, of course, by Julius Caesar
  - (3) Today, we use the Gregorian calendar, of Pope Gregory XIII adopted in 1582
- e The date the early Christians selected fit well with the religious symbolism of Christmas
  - (1) Jesus is compared to the Light of the World
  - (2) John 1:1
    - (a) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.
    - (b) 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
    - (c) 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
  - (3) John's Prologue offers an excellent reason for setting His birthday at the moment it is obvious in nature that darkness is unable to overcome light
- 2 Easter
  - a This feast is set by the "lunar calendar," a calendar with either 12 or 13 lunar months in a year
    - (1) Because dates set by the solar calendar vary from dates set by a lunar calendar, the dating of Easter varies from year to year
    - (2) In AD 325 the church council of Nicaea decided that Easter should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox of March 21.
      - (a) Easter can occur as early as March 22
      - (b) And it can occur as late as April 25.
    - (3) The dating of the first Easter was dependent upon a Jewish feast, Passover
      - (a) And the Jewish people used a lunar, not a solar calendar
      - (b) The approach of Spring was crucial to a primitive people
        - [1] Farmers' lives depended upon planting at the correct time
        - [2] Herdsmen needed to know when to move their flocks
      - (c) The Jewish people, therefore, needed to be aware of the start of a new agricultural season
  - b There is Biblical support for connecting Easter and the Passover
    - (1) The evidence varies between the Synoptics, (Matthew, Mark, Luke,) and John
    - (2) Matthew, Mark, and Luke date the Last Supper as a Passover Meal
      - (a) Mark 14:12
        - [1] On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb
        - [2] .... 17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve.
        - [3] ... 22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."
        - [4] 23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.
      - (b) Matthew 26:17
        - [1] On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, .... 20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve....

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- [2] 26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."
- [3] 27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."
- (c) Luke 22:7
  - [1] Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed....
  - [2] 14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."
  - [3] 17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."
  - [4] 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."
  - [5] 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."
- (d) Jesus seals a new covenant in His blood
- (3) John infers the meal was eaten the night before the Passover begins
  - (a) He presents Jesus as a Passover Lamb
    - [1] John 13:1
      - [a] It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served.
    - [2] John 18:28
      - [a] Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate came out to them
    - [3] John 19:14
      - [a] It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. 15 But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. 16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.
  - (b) His blood spares us from the Angel of Death
  - (c) Jesus was crucified at the time the priests at the Temple began killing the lambs which would be eaten at the evening Passover meal
  - c A long and bitter debate raged in the Church before Nicaea settled upon the method for dating Easter
- II THE CHRISTMAS CYCLE
  - A Our Christmas celebrations are to remind us of our loveliness -- ability to be loved, to accept being loved
    - 1 They are a celebration of a present reality, not of a past history
      - a This present reality is based upon past history
      - b The past event focused upon the mystery that teaches that God became man at Bethlehem
      - c The present reality focuses upon this same love, Jesus, becoming one
        - (1) With each of us
        - (2) With all of us
        - (3) With the Church
    - 2 The union of God with us is an enduring union

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- **a A new, dramatic dimension is added to God loving His people**
  - (1) God's love had been in the world in OT times -- experienced by others
  - (2) But the love had touched lives
    - (a) In an impartial manner
    - (b) In a transitory manner
- **b Christmas, assures us that God doesn't just loan Himself to us**
- **c He unites with us**
  - (1) The endurance of Christian marriage is intended as a religious sign to us and to the world
  - (2) Jesus weds Himself to each of us
    - (a) Revelation 21:2
      - [1] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.
    - (b) Mark 10:11
      - [1] He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her."
  - (3) **We should conclude that nothing we do can ever cause Him to divorce Himself from us!**
- **d All that God is unites with all that we are**
  - (1) This is a tremendous mystery
  - (2) The infinite unites with the finite
  - (3) The eternal unites with the temporal
- **3 Christmas has a significance for those of us who are living in a "codependent" world**
  - **a We are lovable – even though we don't sense it**
    - (1) **Regardless of our past lives, failures, sins**
    - (2) Lovable because we are loved by God who is truth
      - (a) All in life that tells us we do not deserve to be loved is a lie!
      - (b) Since God loves us, we are challenged to love ourselves
  - **b Within us, we possess**
    - (1) **Our sin**
    - (2) **And the holiness of Jesus**
      - (a) Despite its gravity, our sin is still finite
      - (b) And the holiness of Jesus is infinite
      - (c) His life, blood, love, Spirit, washes away all evidence of our sin
    - (3) We are saints of the living God
  - **c Our Christmas challenge is to claim**
    - (1) Our holiness (His holiness born in our hearts)
    - (2) Not our sinfulness
  - **d If we believe we are saints, we'll start living as saints**
- **4 The Christmas mystery is presented through other terms also**
  - **a Christmas is Baptism and Discipleship**
  - **b [1] Discipleship**
    - (1) Jesus enters a life and challenges "follow me"
      - (a) **He invites us to remain with Him, a loving, serving God**
      - (b) We are asked to allow ourselves to continue to be loved by this God
      - (c) We are invited to learn about, to experience God loving us as we are

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- (2) We are challenged
  - (a) To focus upon the love of Jesus
  - (b) Not to stay with our own efforts to establish our worth
    - [1] Our own actions
    - [2] Other people's approval
    - [3] Our material possessions
    - [4] Our accomplishments
- (3) Christmas, then, is learning to stay with Jesus
  - (a) In our hearts
  - (b) In our thoughts
  - (c) With our lives
- c [2] Baptism
  - (1) In Baptism, as in Christmas, Jesus enters our lives and immerses Himself in us
  - (2) In Baptism the wonder begins
    - (a) **We die to self**
    - (b) We are filled with His Spirit
    - (c) And we rise with Him
  - (3) These are the spiritual effects of Baptism
    - (a) The Spirit of Jesus resides within us forever
    - (b) **We become adopted children of God**
  - (4) Since we die with Jesus in the waters of Baptism
    - (a) All our sin dies with us
    - (b) The Spirit of Jesus becomes our new Spirit, our new life
  - (5) Baptism can never and should never be repeated
    - (a) Its permanence reflects the enduring love Jesus offers us
    - (b) Nothing we do can cause Jesus to withdraw His love
- 5 Christmas celebrates the triple Coming of Jesus
  - a His historical coming
    - (1) The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem is the basis of the feast
    - (2) **This birth means that our faith is not founded on a wish, a dream, a hope, but upon an historical fact**
  - b His present coming
    - (1) **Jesus enters the lives of the Church and of individuals in the Church**
      - (a) Through **Word**
      - (b) Through **Sacrament**
      - (c) Through the **Church, collectively and individually**
    - (2) He enters our lives to continue the mystery of His presence within us
  - c His future coming
    - (1) His final entrance will occur either
      - (a) At the end of time as we know it – for the world
      - (b) Or at the moment of our deaths – for those who die before the “end of time”
    - (2) He will come to complete our experience of the love He offers
      - (a) His offering is complete even now

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- (b) His presence in our lives is complete even now
- (c) But our limitations keep us from experiencing this love
  - [1] We usually don't know how completely we are loved
  - [2] By faith we must claim the holiness of this love
  - [3] But one day, we shall know as we are known
- 6 Three Biblical figures whom the Church spotlights during Advent can help us experience the Christmas mystery
  - a Historically, the Church has focused upon these three during Advent
    - (1) [1] Isaiah
    - (2) [2] The Virgin Mary
    - (3) [3] John the Baptist
  - b [1] Isaiah
    - (1) He spoke to a people sitting in the ashes of destruction after Judah had been conquered by the Babylonians
    - (2) He announced to these defeated, subjugated people a message of **absolute victory**
    - (3) He is the Prophet of Comfort who speaks to the depressed, to the dark side of our lives
  - c [2] The Virgin Mary
    - (1) She reminds us that Jesus is not present in our lives because of anyone's efforts
    - (2) He is present because this is God's desire
    - (3) Therefore our failures do not affect His coming to unite with us
  - d [3] John the Baptist
    - (1) He dressed weird
    - (2) He talked weird, acted weird
    - (3) And he thought weird
    - (4) **But He had to prepare the way for Jesus to minister**
      - (a) Jesus could not begin ministering to the world until his arrest
      - (b) The way for Jesus must continue to be prepared by others
      - (c) Otherwise Jesus cannot begin ministering to us
- B The scope of the Christmas Season
  - 1 It begins with Advent
    - a Advent starts four Sundays before Christmas
      - (1) It can vary, therefore, in length
      - (2) It can be as short as 22 days and as long as 28 days
    - b It should be a time of preparation for the mystery of Christmas
      - (1) Christmas doesn't just "happen"
        - (a) Most people in Bethlehem slept through the wonder of their town
          - [1] **Only the shepherds (Luke) or pagan Magi (Matthew) experienced the miracle**
          - [2] And both had to journey, to make an effort, before this could happen
        - (b) We must make our journey during **Advent** if **Christmas** is to be a reality, not a dream, for us
      - (2) Christmas takes effort
        - (a) **We need to remind ourselves of**
          - [1] Our holiness,
          - [2] Our dignity,
          - [3] Our loveliness

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- (b) **If we make this effort**
  - [1] Love becomes more tangible in our lives
    - [a] **We become more aware of our holiness**
    - [b] In short, Jesus becomes more real to us
  - [2] He is reborn within us; He is more than just a wish
- (3) There are ways to celebrate Advent
  - (a) Make and carry out resolutions daily to help us love ourselves
  - (b) Do things like
    - [1] Eating our favorite dessert
    - [2] Listening to our favorite music
- 2 It continues with Christmas
  - a The feast focuses upon the mystery of God's love as present in our world
  - b It begins with Christmas itself
  - c Next it continues with the Feast of the Holy Family
    - (1) **The Sunday after Christmas** celebrates a new aspect to the mystery of Jesus present in our world
    - (2) **Love needs community, a Christian community**
      - (a) Jesus did
        - [1] Luke 2:51
          - [a] Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
      - (b) We do
  - d Then it celebrates Mary, the Mother of God on New Year's Day
    - (1) In order to offer His love to the world God used:
      - (a) **A woman in a chauvinistic society**
      - (b) **A mere youth in a society that respected only the wisdom of age**
      - (c) **A Galilean considered in Judea as rednecks**
    - (2) His love took flesh through her
    - (3) His love continues to take flesh through the wrong kind of people
- 3 Finally, the season concludes with the Epiphanies
  - a There are two aspects to our being loved successfully
    - (1) [1] Our being loved -- Christmas focuses upon this
    - (2) [2] Our becoming aware that we are loved -- Epiphany focuses on this
    - (3) **"Epiphany" means "manifesting," making evident, showing**
    - (4) The Church looks at three aspects of Jesus being manifested
      - (a) [1] His first revelation to the Wise Men
      - (b) [2] His revelation at His baptism
      - (c) [3] His revelation in His ministry as symbolized by the start of that ministry
  - b [1] The Feast of the Epiphany
    - (1) Traditionally it is celebrated on January 6
      - (a) Thus we have the famous "Twelve Days of Christmas" from Christmas unto Epiphany
        - [1] **Epiphany was seen as a "Little Christmas"**
        - [2] In some countries, it actually was celebrated with more pomp than Christmas

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- [a] This was the day Father Christmas, or Santa Claus, came
- [b] Incidentally, "Santa Claus" is "Saint Nicholas," a Catholic bishop noted for helping the needy
- (b) There is a reason to offer gifts on this day rather than **Christmas**
  - [1] This was the day when the magi offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus
  - [2] We can offer our gifts to honor Jesus who is present in the hearts of those to whom we give these gifts
  - [3] Matthew 2:1
    - [a] After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."
    - [b] 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.
    - [c] 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.
    - [d] 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."
    - [e] 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."
    - [f] 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.
    - [g] 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.
    - [h] 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.
  - [4] The significance of the story should not be missed
    - [a] It is more dramatic against its Gospel background:
    - [b] It is found in the most Jewish of the four Gospels
    - [c] And yet it shows pagans, not Jews, as the first to seek out and worship Jesus
- (2) The feast focuses upon the first manifesting of Jesus in Matthew
  - (a) He is experienced by the wise men
  - (b) The only important thing to remember about the "Magi" is that they are **pagans**
- (3) The Gospel offers a glimpse of the beauty of our God
  - (a) **God not only loves you**
  - (b) **God needs you to know that He loves you**
- c [2] The Baptism of Jesus
  - (1) **He ends His "hidden life"**
  - (2) He is revealed at His Baptism,
    - (a) The Father manifests Jesus
      - [1] To all in Matthew and Luke
      - [2] To Jesus alone in Mark;
    - (b) There is no Baptismal revelation in John
  - (3) The Father assures us that all that Jesus does, He does as the Father's representative
- d [3] Jesus starts ministering



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- (1) The ministry of Jesus is intended to help us experience love in our hearts
- (2) Everything that Jesus does to others in His ministry, He desires to do to us
- C THE EASTER CYCLE
  - 1 During the Easter Season, Jesus challenges us to love as we are loved by Him
    - a Like Christmas, Easter is more than just a celebration of an historic anniversary
      - (1) It's more than a reminder "He lives!"
        - (a) The proclamation that Jesus lives is not "Good News" to us
        - (b) It's Good News to Jesus
      - (2) There is "Good News" for us in the Easter message
        - (a) His victory is an assurance of life for us after death
          - [1] But that's a future joy
          - [2] It is important, but the earliest Christians celebrated more than the hope of a better life tomorrow
        - (b) They celebrated the present experience, the present meaning to them of the Resurrection of Jesus
          - [1] The victory of Jesus
          - [2] The victory of love over selfishness, self-centeredness
          - [3] The victory of service over power
          - [4] The victory of spirit over flesh
        - (c) The power of this victory is present within me and within you
          - [1] This force, this Spirit, is the absolute assurance we can love
          - [2] Christmas guaranteed we are love-able: able to be loved as we are
          - [3] Easter guarantees we are love-capable: able to love as we are
    - b Easter celebrates the enduring victory of Jesus
      - (1) Since Easter Jesus continues His mission to witness to the needy, the broken
        - (a) In the world
        - (b) Through the Church
        - (c) Through individual Christians in the Church
      - (2) Again and again Pilates have sought
        - (a) To restrain Him
        - (b) To destroy Him
      - (3) Despite their efforts the Church endured
        - (a) His ministry has remained alive and vibrant
        - (b) The needy have been offered assistance
        - (c) And the thrones of these Pilates have fallen
      - (4) In the Church, there has always been
        - (a) Betrayal
        - (b) Denial
        - (c) Abandonment
        - (d) Popes, bishops, priests, abbots
          - [1] Have scandalized in the worst ways
          - [2] Abandoned the cross for the sword
          - [3] Served Caesar rather than God
          - [4] Worshipped mammon rather than God

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- (5) And yet the ministry has continued in this Church led, at times by Judases -- but also by true shepherds
  - (a) New religious communities arose to serve the lowliest
  - (b) Charismatic lay saints appeared to challenge the hierarchy
- c We must always remember the significance of Easter
  - (1) We can love
    - (a) This gift is not offered just to the Church as a whole
    - (b) It is also offered to each individual Christian
    - (c) It is offered to you! To me!
  - (2) The love of Jesus breaks free of every tomb in which we have buried it
    - (a) Our indifference
    - (b) Our sin
    - (c) Our disbelief
  - (3) These never destroy our ability to love others
    - (a) That power is always alive, dormant within us
    - (b) It will **manifest** itself
    - (c) This is the assurance of **Easter**
  - (4) Whenever we call upon the power of Jesus
    - (a) We are offered the ability to **overcome** in our actions all obstacles to loving and helping others
    - (b) We are offered the ability to **offer ourselves to accept and serve others** as they are
  - (5) Within us, we possess
    - (a) Our **past hurts and scars**
    - (b) Our **present weaknesses, feelings, instincts**
    - (c) Our **future fears**
    - (d) And the love that is Jesus
      - [1] In this love is our victory
      - [2] It is a victory over all that is sick within us
  - (6) Our Easter challenge is to claim
    - (a) Not our feelings and wants
    - (b) But our holiness and ability to love
- d Like Christmas, Easter has its own symbolisms
  - (1) Remember: Christmas is Discipleship and Baptism
  - (2) Easter is Apostleship and Confirmation
  - (3) [1] Apostleship
    - (a) Jesus first called people
      - [1] He allowed them to stay with Him
      - [2] He allowed them to experience how He loves, how He serves
    - (b) Then, after a lapse of time, He sent them forth in His name
      - [1] To minister as He ministered
        - [a] To **preach**
        - [b] To **heal**
        - [c] To **teach**
      - [2] In short, **to love**

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- [3] To love because of need, not because of merit
- (c) Easter is our apostolic commission
  - [1] John 20:21
    - [a] Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.
    - [b] 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
  - [2] He spoke to a Church hiding behind locked doors, locked out of fear
    - [a] He offered these cowards the ability to unlock the doors and witness
    - [b] Peter the coward became Peter the preacher
      - {1} Acts 2:1
        - {1} When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.
        - {2} 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
      - {2} Acts 2:14
        - {1} Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.
  - [3] What He did, He continues to do
    - [a] We must claim the gift
    - [b] We must **open the doors of our hearts and step out to begin witnessing**
- (4) [2] Confirmation
  - (a) In Confirmation
    - [1] Jesus assures us that His Spirit will enable us to love
    - [2] We are so "con-formed" in love that we can love
    - [3] We are touched anew by the Spirit
      - [a] Our experience of the Spirit in Baptism made us love-able
      - [b] The Spirit in Confirmation stirs us to love, making us love-capable
  - (b) The results of the bestowal of the Spirit are
    - [1] Like Baptism, we need only experience this Sacrament once since the manor in which the Spirit is offered endures forever
    - [2] God, thereafter, guarantees us all that we need to serve and love others
- 2 The scope of the Easter Season is as complex as is the Christmas Season
  - a Lent begins the Easter Season
    - (1) Lent is a time of preparation to love others
    - (2) It is supposed to be a time of "joy"
      - (a) This note of joy is surprising to older Catholics
      - (b) They were allowed no enjoyment during Lent
      - (c) They were instructed to look upon the cross
        - [1] They almost pretended Easter had never happened
        - [2] They were challenged to see the horror of sin, of our sin
        - [3] But cross is seen from the wrong perspective if Lent is a time of sorrow and grief
          - [a] The cross is not a sign which we offer to God

**Topic**

- [b] Rather, it is a sign God offers to us
    - {1} It is a sign of the scope of His love for sinners
    - {2} Galatians 6:14
      - {1} May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
    - {3} There is no indication anywhere in the New Testament of remorse regarding the death of Jesus
- (3) It is a season of learning self-denial
  - (a) Not as an end in itself
    - [1] Not to punish self
    - [2] Or to feel miserable
  - (b) But as a prerequisite to loving others
- (4) Love, loving, requires effort
  - (a) Enduring love doesn't just "happen" despite what our modern romantic myths suggest
  - (b) **True love, agape**, requires effort and practice
    - [1] We must learn to **listen to the needs of others** before we can **serve them properly**
    - [2] "Fasting" alone is not enough!
    - [3] We must practice **acts of help** to those in need
- (5) The real length of the season surprises most Catholics
  - (a) They think it is 40 days long because of the "40 days of fasting"
    - [1] But **Lent** is Ash Wednesday to Saturday plus 6 weeks
      - [a] 6 weeks times 7 equals 42 days!
      - [b] The partial week starting **Ash Wednesday** adds 4 more days
    - [2] **Lent** is 46 days long!
  - (b) There is a solution to this quagmire
    - [1] All Sundays celebrate **Easter** including the Sundays of **Lent**
    - [2] Days of celebration are not days of fasting and **self denial**
    - [3] Since **Lent** includes 6 Sundays, the 46 days minus the 6 Sundays equals the 40 days of fasting
- b Lent begins with Ash Wednesday
  - (1) The day offers a solemn call to the Church as a Church, to struggle against self-centeredness in order to love
  - (2) Individuals can, and should make this struggle all through the year
  - (3) During this season, our effort becomes communal
    - (a) The ashes on the forehead are signs to each other
    - (b) They are meant to encourage us when we begin to lag in our Lenten commitment
    - (c) Together we strive to **turn to the needs of our sisters and brothers**
- c Lent reaches its climax during Holy Week
  - (1) Palm Sunday recalls the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem, His Capital
    - (a) A king came to His capital
      - [1] Was received
      - [2] And then was rejected
    - (b) He was rejected because He came as a king of service, not a ruler with power
    - (c) We are challenged to recall that Jesus
      - [1] Comes to us as a God who serves with love, not rules with power

## Topic

- [2] Challenges us to affect the lives of others
    - [a] Not through power, control
    - [b] But through love and acceptance
- (2) Holy Thursday recalls the Last Supper
  - (a) At this meal, Jesus offered us His Body and Blood
    - [1] They seal a new **union, covenant, between Him and us**
    - [2] This union is eternal
  - (b) He also interpreted His action in the foot washing
    - [1] He gives Himself to us to wash us clean
    - [2] He does this because we are dirty, not because we have earned it
  - (c) We, therefore, must serve others
    - [1] We must offer ourselves to them in a union, a fellowship
    - [2] We must serve in a way that washes them clean
    - [3] We must do this because they need the inner cleansing, not because they've earned it
- (3) Good Friday celebrates the joy of the cross
  - (a) In the Garden, Jesus rejects the sword and embraces the cross
  - (b) The Church recalls His Passion
    - [1] It listens to the irony of His trial by Pilate
      - [a] Pilate thought he was trying Jesus
      - [b] In reality, he, Pilate, was trying himself
      - [c] In condemning Jesus to please the world, he sold himself out
    - [2] We are challenged not to make the same error
  - (c) And the Church honors His cross
    - [1] Will we embrace the **cross** as we love others?
      - [a] Serving them?
      - [b] Accepting them?
    - [2] Or will we think we're helping them by wielding the sword?
      - [a] Trying to control them?
      - [b] And actually rejecting them as they now are?
- d Easter reminds us of the victory of Jesus, of our share in this victory
  - (1) **Easter** is actually part of **Holy Week**
  - (2) The Easter Vigil celebrates the victory of light over darkness
    - (a) It is the most solemn of all Church services
      - [1] This rite is the ideal service to receive new members into full communion with the Church
      - [2] It trumpets the **Easter** victory of Jesus as a reality in our world
    - (b) We must mirror each aspect of the Easter mystery in our lives
      - [1] We must accept the new members into our hearts
      - [2] We must attempt to live in the Light, not the darkness of sin and selfishness
      - [3] We must allow loving service to be a reality in our lives
  - (3) Easter is to be the discovery of a reality not the celebration of a history
    - (a) The joy of the **Resurrection** continues at all the Masses
    - (b) The reality proclaimed at the **vigil** should continue to be reflected in our living each day of our lives
  - (4) Easter like the two other great Church feasts is celebrated solemnly for an entire week

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- (5) The solemn celebration continues all through the week and concludes the next **Sunday**
- e The Ascension completes the Easter mystery
  - (1) It is celebrated 40 days after Easter, following the timetable offered in the second book of Luke, "Acts of the Apostles"
  - (2) Luke tells us in Acts
    - (a) That Jesus remained with the Church 40 days
    - (b) That he offered us all we need to know about God's presence in our lives
  - (3) Matthew, John, Luke's Gospel offer a different timetable
    - (a) The ascending occurs on Easter Sunday
      - [1] It culminates and completes **Easter**
      - [2] It announces that Jesus is with God in glory, never to die again
    - (b) Can we claim our unity with Jesus?
      - [1] Can we believe we, too, are in the Father's presence?
      - [2] Can we look at the events of this earth from the vantage point of eternity?
- f Pentecost is the third great feast of the Church
  - (1) It celebrates the birthday of the Church, the constant re-creation of the Church
    - (a) It is our assurance that the Good News is our reality
    - (b) The Spirit of Jesus continues to be offered to the Church
    - (c) And this Spirit allows the Church to minister as it otherwise never could
  - (2) This day ends the Easter season
    - (a) Do we claim our membership in a community?
    - (b) Are we accepting our responsibility to witness with the Spirit?
- g After Pentecost Sunday there are two special Sundays
  - (1) They are not part of the Easter Season
  - (2) The Feast of the Holy Trinity
    - (a) It celebrates
      - [1] The source of our love -- the Father
      - [2] The one who brings us the love -- the Son
      - [3] The love itself -- the Spirit
    - (b) Do we confuse those who bring our love with the source?
  - (3) The Feast of the Body of Christ, the Eucharist
    - (a) The title refers to His glorified Body
      - [1] And it refers equally to the Church
      - [2] Do we respect them both equally?
    - (b) The feast actually celebrates the Lord's Supper
      - [1] The meal includes the bread which becomes His Body
      - [2] But it also includes the wine which becomes the Blood of the Covenant
      - [3] Each sign challenges us
        - [a] The bread offers us life, communal life
        - [b] The cup offers us joy, endless spiritual joy
- IV THE GENERAL WEEKS OF THE YEAR
  - A This is a split season
    - 1 It begins after the Baptism of Jesus and lasts until the day before Ash Wednesday

## Topic

- a From the end of the Christmas Season
- b To the start of the Easter Season
- 2 It resumes after Pentecost and lasts until Advent
- 3 It covers a total of 33 or 34 Sundays
- 4 There is only one special Sunday during this period
  - a It is the last one, **Christ the King**
  - b We remember that we are challenged to rule with Him
    - (1) But He rules by serving
    - (2) We should ask ourselves at the conclusion of each Church year
      - (a) Have we learned to serve more universally?
      - (b) Have we learned to serve more completely?
- B Each Sunday there are special readings for the Mass
  - 1 There are three readings
  - 2 The first is from the OT (except during Easter when it comes from the Book of Acts)
    - a These readings are selected because they contain some reference to the Gospel of the day
    - b Sometimes they are edited for this reason, changing the actual spirit of the passage
  - 3 The second is always from a NT Letter
    - a Important sections are read from the NT letters in sequence Sunday after Sunday
    - b They do not necessarily have any connection to the Gospel
  - 4 The final reading is always from a Gospel
    - a There is a three year cycle spreading out the readings from the four Gospels
    - b Significant sections are selected and read from Matthew during Cycle A
    - c Significant sections are selected and read from Mark during Cycle B
    - d Significant sections are selected and read from Luke during Cycle C
    - e Significant sections from are John scattered over several seasons and several yearly cycles
- C The readings from daily Mass follow a different pattern
  - 1 There are only two readings
  - 2 They are spread over a two year cycle
    - a The Gospel readings are the same each year
      - (1) Key sections from the Gospels are read in sequence except for the special seasons
      - (2) Mark is read first
      - (3) Then Matthew is read
      - (4) Luke closes out the Church year
    - b The first readings are cycled over two years
      - (1) Key sections of the Old Testament and the New Testament are read in sequence
      - (2) Every few months the readings switch from the OT to NT
      - (c) There are special readings for the Christmas and Easter seasons
- V CONCLUSION: In all readings and celebrations
  - A Remember the purpose is
    - 1 Not learning about
    - 2 But believing in
    - 3 And reacting to Jesus
  - B He is the Good News!

**Topic**

- C He is our religion