



What is a lesser festival? When and how do we celebrate them?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.

Background

The basic Christian festival is Sunday (see also, [“Why worship on Sunday?”](#)). In addition to this weekly festival of the resurrection of Jesus, which is celebrated with Word and Sacrament, the church also observes other great festivals associated with the life of Jesus and the mystery of our redemption. Principal festivals and observances are: the Nativity of our Lord and the Epiphany of Our Lord; Ash Wednesday and the days of Holy Week; the Three Days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Resurrection of our Lord (Easter); the Sundays of Easter, the Ascension of Our Lord, and the Day of Pentecost; and the holy Trinity.

Lesser festivals mark and celebrate events in the life of Christ, Christ’s presence in the lives of the saints, and prominent festivals of the church. Observing these lesser festivals is a way of recovering and upholding the sense of the communion of saints that is so important to our understanding of the church: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints. . ." (Apostles’ Creed, Third Article).

Evangelical Lutheran Worship identifies days called lesser festivals as listed below:

<p>January 1 NAME OF JESUS — White 18 CONFESSION OF PETER — White (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins) 25 CONVERSION OF PAUL — White (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity ends)</p>	<p>February 2 PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD — White</p>
<p>March 19 JOSEPH, GUARDIAN OF JESUS — White 25 ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LORD — White</p>	<p>April 25 MARK, EVANGELIST — Scarlet/Red</p>

<p>May 1 PHILIP AND JAMES, APOSTLES, — Scarlet/Red 14 MATTHIAS, APOSTLE — Scarlet/Red 31 VISIT OF MARY TO ELIZABETH — White</p>	<p>June 11 BARNABAS, APOSTLE — Red 24 JOHN THE BAPTIST — White 29 PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES — Scarlet/Red</p>
<p>July 3 THOMAS, APOSTLE — Scarlet/Red 22 MARY MAGDALENE, APOSTLE — White 25 JAMES, APOSTLE — Scarlet/Red</p>	<p>August 15 MARY, MOTHER OF OUR LORD — White 24 BARTHOLOMEW, APOSTLE — Red</p>
<p>September 14 HOLY CROSS DAY — Scarlet/Red 21 MATTHEW, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST — Scarlet/Red 29 MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS — White</p>	<p>October 18 LUKE, EVANGELIST — Scarlet/Red 28 SIMON AND JUDE, APOSTLES — Scarlet/Red 31 REFORMATION DAY — Red</p>
<p>November 1 ALL SAINTS DAY — White 30 ANDREW, APOSTLE — Scarlet/Red</p>	<p>December 26 STEPHEN, DEACON AND MARTYR — Scarlet/Red 27 JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST — White 28 THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS — Scarlet/Red</p>

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Practice

When do we observe the lesser festivals? Do they replace the Sunday lectionary propers? It is important to note that these festivals are called *lesser* festivals. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* does provide for some lesser festivals to replace the Sunday lectionary propers regardless of the day of the week on which they fall (Name of Jesus, the Presentation of Our Lord, Reformation Day, and All Saints Day). Other lesser festivals may be observed on a Sunday when their date falls on a Sunday (John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, Mary, Mother of Our Lord, Holy Cross Day, and Michael and All Angels.) Still other lesser festivals would rarely or never replace Sunday propers because they fall within the primary seasons of the church (Advent, Lent or Easter) and the seasonal texts are favored (Andrew, Annunciation of Our Lord, Mark, Philip and James, and Matthias.) The remainder of the lesser festivals, when their date falls on a Sunday, are usually transferred to the first available weekday. Local congregations may consider whether observing a lesser festival other than those named outweighs the value of observing the Sunday propers.

With the exception of All Saints' Day, lesser festivals have only one set of readings, not three, as Sundays do. This means that a day such as Reformation Day (when it is celebrated on Sunday) will use the same set of readings every year. Worship planners should be aware that the carefully chosen lessons of the Revised Common Lectionary for Sundays is disrupted when one set of them is replaced on any given Sunday by those appropriate for a lesser festival.

Help is available for making these decisions in the resources supporting *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (see below) and in *Sundays and Seasons*.

Consider these possibilities:

- To uphold the centrality of Sunday and its resurrection emphasis it is possible to observe lesser festivals on other days of the week, even when their date falls on a Sunday.
- To maintain the emphasis on Sunday and also observe lesser festivals, worship planners and preachers can use the Sunday readings but announce the designation for the Sunday it is and also note the festival of _____.
- We can use the prayer of the day for the lesser festival following the prayer of the day for the Sunday. Connect the lesser festival to the Sunday celebration by integrating its central concerns in the sermon on Sunday's texts.
- Integrate the lesser festival into the intercessions prepared for the Sunday celebration, particularly in the concluding commendation of the faithful departed when the lesser festival celebrates a saint's day.
- Use the relationship between Sunday and a lesser festival as an occasion to preach and teach about their places in our understanding of redemption.

RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions:

- 🔗 Why Worship on Sunday?
- 🔗 What is a Commemoration? How Do We Celebrate Them?
- 🔗 What is the meaning and use of liturgical colors?

Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:

- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Leaders Desk Edition*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- 📖 *Sundays and Seasons*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. Print version published annually by church year.
 - 📖 Also available as an online subscription at www.sundaysandseasons.com.
- 📖 Ramshaw, Gail. *More Days for Praise*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016.
- 📖 Ramshaw, Gail and Mons Teig. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Keeping Time, The Church's Years*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.
- 📖 The Consultation on Common Texts. *The Revised Common Lectionary*. 1992. 20th Anniversary Edition, 2012.
- 📖 The Consultation on Common Texts. *The Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings*, 2005.

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