

**The Church's Coloring Book**  
**Power in the Spirit, June 14, 2024**

Why do colors in the church matter? Our salvation is not at stake in the colors we choose for worship (adiaphora). If salvation is not at stake, then why is color in church so important to us? I would suggest that color in worship, coordinated with the lectionary and an understanding of the church year, is a major and significant aspect of worship and constitutes part of the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving God desires from us in worship.

A. The Incarnation

Luther vs Calvin (*The Form of Church Prayers*) on physical, material things and their place in worship, especially regarding the Lord's Supper. Sacramental theology, for Lutherans, is about God's grace coming to us through material things with the Word. "To speak of divine presence at a place helps preserve the personal character of that presence, for persons are always associated with places. Because the human is so shaped by place as well as time, worship for Israel could never be careless of times and places. Because the human is not simply a spiritual creature but physical through and through, there had to be a tangible place, as well as sights and sounds, touch and movement, in Israel's worship" (Terrence Fretheim).

B. Creation

Intellect, poetry, art, color, imagination, music are all gifts of God which God declares good. Responsibility for creation involves the use of creation's gifts.

C. The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving and Praise

There is only one thing we bring to God in worship, and that is the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. Everything else in worship is God coming down to us. Only one thing does he ask in return, one sacrifice only (Ps 65:1; 68:1; 100:4; 138:1; 1 Chronicles 16:7; 25:3; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Nehemiah 12:46).

D. Lectionary, Church Year, and Color: Answering the Christological Question

Who is Jesus? The fundamental question of Scripture is the Christological question: Who is Jesus? Worship answers this fundamental question by coordinating the Lectionary, the church year, and colors to tell the story of Jesus and God's Good News.

1. The story in one year: from First Coming to Second Coming; Advent to Advent
2. The story in three years: Matthew, Mark (and, uh, John), and Luke
3. The story in color

<b>Season</b>	<b>Color</b>	<b>Purpose/Meaning</b>
Advent	Blue/Purple	Preparation for Jesus' coming(s) Purple: need for repentance to greet Jesus Blue: joy and eager anticipation of his coming (Rose on Gaudete Sunday, but only if the other color is purple)
Christmas	White	Nativity as God's way of finding the lost
Epiphany	Green	Manifestations of Jesus as Son of God (Magi, Baptism, Temptation, miracles, Transfiguration)
Lent	Purple	Why Jesus Had to go to the Cross (Rose on laetare Sunday) (Black on Good Friday)
Easter	White	God's victory over sin, death, and the devil
Pentecost	Green	The time of the church

The first six months of the church year present all the major events of Jesus' life in a regular cycle: his advent, his nativity, self-manifestations, suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension, and the descent of the Holy Spirit to found the church. The remaining six months of the year focus on the church's role in proclaiming Jesus Christ in word and deed.

### **Notes on Color**

The first written reference to a color in worship other than white comes from a treatise by Pope Innocent III (c 1198). He indicates that the use of colors has been going on, but there is no clear knowledge of when the practice started. In the early church period, white was always used in worship and festivals were celebrated with the best materials available, regardless of color. Colors were used, but there was no uniformity of practice.

Soon after, however, the following color scheme emerged:

Red, for blood and fire, was used on days commemorating martyrs, apostles, or the Holy Spirit

Violet or black was the color for penance and mourning

Green, the color of nature and growth, was used for all ordinary Sundays

White, the symbol of joy and purity, was reserved for the great festivals

By the time of Pope Pius V (1570) the liturgical year and colors were fixed and uniform.

Variations in color, for instance, with baptisms and funerals.