LITURGICAL COLORS

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The association of particular colors with liturgical seasons and celebrations developed gradually. The association of certain colors as symbolic of certain concepts emerged quite naturally. For instance, red is associated with blood, white with purity, gold with festivity, yellow with energy, purple with dignity, green with growth, light blue with hope, dark blue and black with despair and mourning.

The introduction of colors in Christian worship has a varied history. For the first few centuries the color of vestments and altar linens was without particular significance. White was the color of preference in the church, both in Rome and later in the Byzantine Empire, and it reflected the customary pattern of the middle and upper classes. Liturgical vestments followed the pattern of civilian colors of preference. It was not until the 11th or 12th centuries that the correlation of colors with liturgical seasons and celebrations was established.

It is not surprising that Jerusalem, the historical center of liturgical development and a leader in setting liturgical trends, led the way in the practice of liturgical colors. The following list of liturgical colors reflects the general practice in Jerusalem. It must be noted here that the use of a particular liturgical color for a specific season or celebration includes priestly vestments, the vestments of deacons and clerics, and altar linen including curtains. The practice of liturgical colors for vestments and altar linen during various liturgical seasons is not widely practiced throughout the Armenian Church in the United States. The reason for this lack is partly economical—it gets quite expensive to acquire all the colors and an adequate vestry would be needed for storage. As it is, the use of seasonal liturgical colors in the United States is limited to priestly vestments and altar linen only and over the years most parishes have managed to acquire the appropriate colors for most of the liturgical seasons. The following is a list of liturgical colors and their symbolism.

LITURGICAL SEASON/FEAST/CELEBRATION	COLOR	SYMBOLISM
Advent	Purple /Violet	Penitence/Expectation
Nativity/Epiphany	White	Purity/Joy/Truth
Lent and weeks of fasting	Purple/Violet	Penitence/Expectation
Palm Sunday	Green	Life/Nature/Palm and Olive branches
Holy Week	Purple/Violet	Penitence/Expectation
Holy Friday	Black	Mourning
Easter Eve/Easter/Eastertide	White	Purity/Joy/Truth/New life
Pentecost	Red	Holy Spirit/Fire
Feast of Holy Etchmiadzin and other feasts of the Church	Green	Life/Growth/Nature
Transfiguration	White	Purity/Joy/Truth
Assumption and other Marian Feasts	White or Light Blue	Purity/Virginity Hope
Exaltation and Feasts of the Cross	Green	Life/Growth
Saints	White	Purity/Sainthood
Martyrs	Red	Blood/Sacrifice
Virgins	White	Purity/Virginity
Apostles	Gold	Festivity/Dignity/Celebration
Baptisms	White	Purity/Cleanliness
Weddings (First Marriage)	White	Purity/Virginity
Weddings (Second Marriage)	Red	Sacrifice *(This is a new situation facing the Church and the choice of red is more appropriate since wearing white (symbol of purity and virginity) would be incompatible with the reality.*
Funerals	Black or White or Light Blue	Mourning Resurrection Hope/Eternal life