

# ADVENT



A Season of Preparation, Hope, and Expectation

## THE SEASON

The church year in the West begins with with a preparatory season called “Advent.” The word “advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “appearing” or “coming,” referring to the appearing of a great king or even a god. In Christian usage, it refers to the appearing of Jesus Christ in two ways - His first appearing as the Child born of the Virgin Mary and His second appearing in glory on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. You see, Advent isn’t only about getting ready for Christmas; it’s also about getting ready for Jesus’ final appearing in glory only the Last Day.

We live in the last days, between Christ’s first and second appearances. He is always present with us, and always has been since the beginning. His presence is made audible and visible to us by the Spirit through the preached Word and the Sacraments. Only briefly did the Son of God show His face some 2000 years ago. Only at the end will we see His face again when He appears in glory. Until then, we watch and wait for His second advent as we celebrate His first.

St. Bernard wrote this concerning the coming of Christ: “In the first coming, Christ comes in the flesh and in weakness; in the second, He comes in Spirit and power; in the third, He comes in glory and majesty; and the second coming is the means whereby we pass from the first to the third.”

The season of Advent has its origins in France and Spain in the 4th and 5th centuries. As early as 380, the Council of Saragossa urged faithful Christians to attend church every day from December 17 through Epiphany (January 6). Early calendars in both the East and the West indicated a 40 day period of fasting, beginning on November 14. The liturgical principle is “fast before feast,” following the pattern of Lent and Easter. Before a major feast there is a period of fasting - solemn, repentant preparation. This stands in sharp contrast to our consumerist culture that feasts first and then diets afterward, resolving to “do better” in the new year. Joyful feasting and disciplined fasting go hand in hand.

Advent has four distinct Sundays themed by the readings from the holy Gospel. The 1st Sunday in Advent focuses on Christ’s appearing in glory with the image of His triumphal ride into Jerusalem as the messianic King. The 2nd Sunday brings John the Baptizer’s prophetic voice calling Israel out to the wilderness to “prepare the way of the Lord.” The 3rd Sunday again focuses on John the Baptizer, this time on the content of his preaching of repentance and his greatness as the forerunner of the Messiah. The 4th Sunday emphasizes Jesus’ immaculate conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. During the final week of Advent, it is customary to pray the “O Antiphons” from December 17 to December 23, a series of ancient prayers addressed to Christ in terms of Old Testament prophesy.

Advent is a season of quiet anticipation and expectation. The One who once came in humility by way of Bethlehem's manger, David's donkey, and Calvary's cross, who now comes to us hiddenly in His holy Word and the blessed Sacrament of His body and blood, will soon come visibly in blazing glory to raise the dead and give eternal life to all who call on His Name. The tone of Advent is one of joyful anticipation, a mixture of holy fear and expectant joy, like that of a mother-to-be awaiting the arrival of her first baby.

Advent is a time of patience. Sadly, our instant gratification culture seems to have had more influence on the Church than the Church has had on the surrounding culture. Advent has been gobbled up by the frenzy of the "winter holidays," which now begin after Halloween! By the time Christmas arrives, most are too weary to worship and too burned out from decking our halls to celebrate the birth of the world's Savior with any degree of joy. Remember, Christmas is a twelve day feast, *beginning* on December 25th. In celebrating Advent in all its somber, sober watchfulness, we Christians can give a priceless gift to each other and to the world by showing the patient hope we have in Jesus' coming.

The season has its own peculiar customs and traditions. One cherished tradition is the Advent wreath. This evergreen wreath with four candles is a tradition from northern Europe. Each candle stands for one of the four Sundays in Advent. The closed circle is a symbol of God's eternity. Like the circle, our Lord is without beginning and without end. The evergreen branches represent the eternal life that is ours through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a life that transcends death itself. Just as the evergreen remains alive and fresh even in the dead of winter, so Jesus fills us with new life even in death. "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

The candles remind us of Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world, the Light no darkness can overcome. They also represent all baptized believers in Jesus who reflect His light into the darkness of this world and proclaim Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9-10). Each successive week in Advent, another candle is lit. Sometimes smaller candles or little red berries are added to count off the days between Sundays. At Christmas Eve, the Advent wreath is replaced with a single white Christ candle, signifying the appearing of Christ in the world.

As the candles on the Advent wreath burn ever more brightly with the approach of Christmas, we are reminded of how near is the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. Good news indeed! He comes to judge the world in His righteousness, and the verdict will be "innocent" in His atoning death. Your faith in Him will not be in vain. He comes to save!

Other Advent customs include the Advent calendar with its little doors or pockets each concealing a gift or Scripture verse and counting the days to Christmas, and the “Jesse Tree,” depicting the family tree of Jesus as the promised Branch from the stem of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). Advent calendars and Jesse Trees make fun family projects during the season of Advent.

The intent of Advent is not to “take the fun” out of Christmas but to restore the joy and celebration to Christmas by having a period of prayerful preparation and to put Christ back into December. As we celebrate Christ’s first coming by way of the Virgin and the manger, and as we delight in His sacramental coming to us in the Word and Supper, we await His coming in glory at a day and an hour no one knows.

*E'en so, Lord Jesus, quickly come  
And night shall be no more  
They need no light, no lamp, nor sun  
For Christ will be their All!*

## THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

Advent is a fasting season. Fasting is a “fine outward discipline,” according to the Small Catechism. While it does not commend us before God nor is it to be seen by others (Mt 6:16), fasting is a valuable spiritual and physical discipline to train our appetites and bring them into conformity with our will. Sadly, the excessive eating and drinking of the “holiday season” leaves us spiritually and physically debilitated. Many people make “resolutions” to diet and exercise in the new year in order to undo the damage of the holidays. Far better to exercise discipline and restraint in the days leading up to the feast of Christmas, so that we may enjoy the full twelve day feast with guilt-free joy. Fasting is really a part of ordered, disciplined feasting.

From the early centuries, Christians fasted each week on Wednesdays and Fridays. Wednesday was the day our Lord was betrayed by Judas, Friday the day He was crucified for our salvation. Fasting disciplines vary. Some eat nothing or simply a bit of bread and water. Others refrain from eating rich foods such as meats, cheese, or deserts. The time normally reserved for food preparation and eating is used for prayer and devotion. The money saved is given to the poor or to charities.

If you have never tried the discipline of fasting before, Advent would be a good way to start. Here is a simple program. On Wednesdays and Fridays in Advent, refrain from eating meat, cheeses, and desserts. If you are experienced at fasting, you may wish to extend this fast for the entire season, excepting Sundays. Sundays are always joyful little Easters. If you have specific dietary requirements for health reasons, by all means, stay with them. Don't starve yourself, but allow yourself to be hungry. As Luther once quipped, we must teach the belly god that he doesn't need to be fed every time he growls. If you enjoy wine or other drink, limit yourself to a single glass of wine, or, if you wish, abstain from alcohol entirely (except of course, the Lord's Supper!) during Advent. If you are unaccustomed to fasting, you may simply elect to eat a small lunch on Wednesdays and Fridays in Advent, and spend the lunch hour reading Scripture and devotions. You would be surprised how far an apple and a handful of almonds will take you.

Whatever you decide to do, do it prayerfully and intentionally. That is one reason why seasons and days of fasting are so helpful. They discipline you to fast even if you “don't feel like it.” Don't make a public display of your fasting. As Jesus teaches, wash your face, comb your hair, put a smile on your face, and keep your fast between you and God. Use the extra time for prayer, Bible reading, and devotion. Make an Advent “alms box” and collect the money you didn't spend on food to give to someone in need or put it into the kettle of those bell ringing folks you see at this time of year. When you break your fast, don't gorge yourself or make up for what you missed, but prayerfully enjoy each bite as a precious gift from God who gives seed to the sower and daily bread for our tables.

Should you lapse in your Advent discipline and unwittingly grab that slice of Christmas fruit cake (does anyone actually eat those things?), don't beat yourself up over it, and by no means, do not lapse into religious guilt. This is a man-made discipline, not a commandment from God. But do take a reflective moment to recognize how our appetites control us, and how out of control our eating and drinking can be. "For freedom Christ has set you free," therefore, let nothing, including your eating and drinking, enslave you.

You will likely find several benefits to your Advent fast. You will discover the joy of being in control of your eating and drinking. Or you may discover, to your chagrin, how much of a slave to your appetites you actually are. Either way, this is a great benefit and blessing. You will rediscover the joy of food and drink and may even find freedom from the "religion" of dieting. You may lose a pound or two before Christmas, though the purpose of fasting is not to lose weight. You will realize the superiority of intentional devotional discipline over those silly new year's resolutions, which are usually too little and too late. You will find your prayers and devotions increased and sharpened. You will have a little more to give to those whose stomachs are empty every day of the year. And you may very well find yourself more relaxed and focused than ever before.

## ADVENT IN THE HOME

Advent can be a rich and meaningful time for the family. It need not preclude Christmas shopping and decorating, but can enrich these activities and bring new meaning to them.

Here are some suggestions for celebrating the season of Advent in the home.

1. Attend Wednesday Evening Prayer at church, each Wednesday at 7:30 pm. Advent is a time of watchful prayer and devotion, and what better place to do that than in church with your congregation. Wednesday is a fast day, so your meals will be simple anyway.
2. Do daily devotions. If you don't have a regular discipline of daily devotions, or if you've slipped since Lent, this is a good time to renew the habit. Do the assigned readings and prayers for the season, using the Advent wreath as your devotional symbol.
3. Clean the house. This is a time-honored Advent custom worthy of reviving. You're probably going to have a lot of guests anyway, so you may as well do some preparatory scrubbing. Have the kids clean their own rooms. Give the kitchen a good, hard cleaning while singing an Advent hymn. "Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near." Go through the closets and drawers and get rid of unwanted clothing and excess "stuff." Make those rough places smooth and those crooked places straight.
4. Decorate the house for Christmas in stages. Set out a few things at a time and take the time to enjoy them and all the memories they hold. Set out the nativity scene, but leave out the Christ Child until Christmas Eve. Make a special point of placing the Child in the manger on Christmas Eve while reading Luke 2:1-20. If you want to be "historically correct," don't let those wise men and camels on the scene until Epiphany (January 6), but a little historic license is fine.

Try not to drag the Christmas tree into the house until it is close to Christmas, preferably after the fourth Sunday of Advent. Let the Advent wreath be the dominant symbol. Decorate the Christmas tree in stages and light it for the first time on Christmas Eve. (You don't light the candles on the birthday cake three weeks before the birthday, do you?)

5. If you have light displays on the outside of your house, don't light things up right away. Wait at least until December 17, if not the 24th, unless of course there is a block competition going on. And by all means, don't put Christmas out on the curb on December 26th. You're just getting warmed up! Keep the Christmas tree going and

your outdoor lights on until Epiphany, January 6th. (That is unless your CC&Rs prohibit it. Then you may want to make a fuss with your local homeowner's association over the free practice of your religion.)

6. Make a Jesse Tree or an Advent calendar together with your kids. Tuck a catechism verse or Scripture behind each door or in a little pouch for each day. Talk about Jesus' family tree and point out how Jesus is the promised Son of David. There are great resources for Jesse Trees and Advent calendars on the internet.

7. Bake your Christmas cookies. Try not to eat them. It's a great exercise in fasting and delayed gratification. Put those scrumptious morsels away until Christmas and then have twelve days of unrestrained joy. Note to the bakers - sample one if you must, but only if you must, and then only one!

8. Send out your Christmas cards and those wonderfully informative Christmas letters about a week before Christmas so that they actually arrive...at Christmas.

9. When people say, "Happy Holidays" or "Merry Christmas," respond by saying "Blessed Advent." It will be a conversation starter about the reason for the season.

10. Hold back on the Christmas carols that have been blaring over the speakers in the stores and the commercials on TV since Halloween. Take some time and learn those haunting hymns of Advent; they are some of the most beautiful hymns of the faith. Find some CDs of Advent music and fill your home with the peaceful songs of anticipation and hope. Break out the Christmas carols at Christmas, and then do it for a full twelve days of Fa-la-la-la-la.

11. When it comes time for Christmas presents, try spacing things out over the twelve days of Christmas. All too often, opening Christmas presents, especially with children, is reduced to an fevered frenzy of ripped paper, tangled ribbon, and a search for the proper size batteries. Try the discipline of delayed gratification, a little "now but not yet," just like our salvation. Open one present at a time, thankfully reflecting on both the gift and the giver. Take time to enjoy the gift, and look forward to another one tomorrow. Keep gifts simple and thoughtful

12. Speaking of twelve days, there is nothing wrong with a little "post-Christmas" Christmas shopping. Forget that "special someone" on your list? No problem! You've got twelve whole days and all those post-Christmas sales to stretch your holy day cheer even further.

## ADVENT DEVOTIONAL RESOURCES

### Rite of Blessing of the Advent Wreath

*The father or the head of the household serves as the leader.*

L: In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

L: As we begin the season of Advent, let this wreath remind us that Jesus Christ came to conquer the darkness of sin and to lead us into the light of His glorious kingdom. As the prophet Isaiah says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." (Isaiah 9:2)

L: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

C: **Who made heaven and earth.**

L: O Lord Jesus Christ, the true Light who comes into the world to enlighten all people, bless us as we light the candles of this wreath in preparation for Your coming, and enkindle in our hearts the fire of Your love that we may receive You with joy and gladness and evermore remain steadfast in the faith; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

*Creator of the stars of night,  
Thy people's everlasting Light;  
O Christ, Redeemer, save us all  
And hear Thy servants when they call.  
(Lutheran Service Book #351)*

### Verses and Prayers for Lighting the Advent Wreath

#### The 1st Week in Advent

*Each day at the beginning of daily devotions, the first candle is lit, and the following verse and prayer are spoken:*

Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation.

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*The King shall come when morning dawns*

*And light and beauty brings  
Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray:  
Come quickly, King of kings!  
(Lutheran Service Book #348)*

### **The 2nd Week in Advent**

*As two candles are lit, the following verse and prayer are recited:*

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Prepare the royal highway;  
The King of kings is near!  
Let every hill and valley  
A level road appear!  
Then greet the King of Glory  
Foretold in sacred story:  
Hosanna to the Lord,  
For He fulfills God's Word.  
(Lutheran Service Book #343)*

### **The Third Sunday in Advent**

*As three candles are lit (including the rose colored one, if available), the following verses and prayers are recited:*

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding!  
"Christ is near," we hear it say.  
"Cast away the works of darkness,  
All you children of the Day!"  
(Lutheran Service Book #345)*

## **The Fourth Sunday in Advent**

*As four candles are lit, the following verses and prayers are recited:*

Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence.

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Of the Father's love begotten  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the Source, the Ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see  
Evermore and evermore.  
(Lutheran Service Book #384)*

## Readings and Antiphons for December 17 to 23

The last seven nights of Advent are called the “Golden Nights” in which the O Antiphons are chanted. The O Antiphons are here given along with the corresponding verse of the hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (LSB #357).

### December 17

Proverbs 8 / Corinthians 1:18-31

O Sapientia,  
quae ex ore Altissimi prodiisti,  
attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter,  
suaviterque disponens omnia:  
veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

O Wisdom,  
proceeding from the mouth of the Most High,  
pervading and permeating all creation,  
mightily ordering all things:  
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,  
Who ord'rest all things mightily;  
To us the path of knowledge show,  
And teach us in her ways to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

### December 18

Exodus 3:1-15 / Philipians 2:5-11

O Adonai,  
et dux domus Israëli,  
qui Moyse in igne flammae rubi apparuisti,  
et ei in Sina legem dedisti:  
veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.

O Adonai and ruler of the house of Israel,  
who appeared to Moses in the burning bush  
and gave him the Law on Sinai:  
Come with an outstretched arm and redeem us.

*O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,  
Who to thy tribes on Sinai's height  
In ancient times didst give the Law  
In cloud and majesty and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

**December 19**

Isaiah 11:1-16 / Revelation 22:16

O Radix Jesse,  
qui stas in signum populorum,  
super quem continebunt reges os suum,  
quem gentes deprecabuntur:  
veni ad liberandum nos,  
jam noli tardare

O Root of Jesse,  
standing as an ensign before the peoples,  
before whom all kings are mute,  
to whom the nations will do homage;  
Come quickly to deliver us.

*O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,  
Free them from Satan's tyranny  
that rust Thy mighty pow'r to save,  
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

**December 20**

Isaiah 22:15-25 / Matthew 16:13-20

O Clavis David,  
et sceptrum domus Israël,  
qui aperis, et nemo claudit,  
claudis, et nemo aperuit:  
veni, et educ vinctum  
de domo carceris,  
sedentem in tenebris,  
et umbra mortis.

O Key of David  
and scepter of the house of Israel,  
you open and no one can close,  
you close and no one can open:  
Come and rescue the prisoners  
who are in darkness  
and the shadow of death.

*O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

**December 21**

Isaiah 9:1-7 / Malachi 4:2 / Revelation 22:16

O Oriens,  
splendor lucis aeternae,  
et sol justitiae:  
veni, et illumina  
sedentes in tenebris,  
et umbra mortis.

O Dayspring,  
splendor of light everlasting:  
Come and enlighten  
those who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death.

*O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,  
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

## **December 22**

Zechariah 9:9-10 / 1 Peter 2:4-6

O Rex Gentium,  
et desideratus earum,  
lapisque angularis,  
qui facis utraque unum:  
veni, et salva hominem,  
quem de limo formasti.

O King of nations,  
the ruler they long for,  
the cornerstone uniting all people:  
Come and save us all,  
whom you formed out of clay.

*O come, Desire of nations, bind  
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,  
And be Thyself our King of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

## **December 23**

Readings: Isaiah 7:1-8:10 / Matthew 1:18-25

*O Emmanuel,  
Rex et legifer noster,  
expectatio gentium,  
et Salvator earum:  
veni ad salvandum nos,  
Domine, Deus noster.*

*O Emmanuel,  
our King and our Lord,  
the anointed for the nations  
and their Savior:  
Come and save us,  
O Lord our God.*

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
*Rejoice! Rejoice!*  
*Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church**

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Divine Service - Sunday 9 am  
Advent Evening Prayer - Wednesday 7:30 pm  
Christmas Eve - 7:30 pm  
Christmas Day - 10:00 am