

INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT FOR GENERATIONS OF FAITH

Advent is the 4 week period before Christmas when the Church celebrates the first coming of Christ and anticipates his second coming. Advent can fall on any date between (and including) November 27 and December 3. This year (2010) Advent begins on November 28 (dates in other years). Prayers: Advent Prayers

The season of Advent marks the beginning of the church year and comprises the four weeks before Christmas. The church has observed a season of preparation before Christmas since the appearance of regulations on fasting issued by Bishop Perpetuus of Tours in 490 C.E.

Basic Facts About Advent

- Liturgical Color(s): Violet or Sarum Blue (optional: Rose for 3rd Advent)
- Type of Holiday: Season; Fast
- Time of Year: Roughly 4 weeks before Christmas; Sunday after Christ the King Sunday
- Duration: 4 Sundays and their weeks ending at Christmas Eve
- Celebrates/Symbolizes: Jesus' first and second comings

Scriptural References Foundations for Advent

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the expected Jewish Messiah, although Jesus was not the Messiah most Jews at the time expected, a warrior who would forcibly overthrow the Romans. The gospel writers are clear that Jesus did not come to establish an earthly kingdom, or deliver the Jewish people from the Romans, but rather he proclaimed a heavenly kingdom available to Jew and Gentile alike. Even though early Christians understood that Jesus reigned in the Church, they knew that all things had not been subjected fully to him, so Christians understood that there existed a future finalization of his kingdom. Thus, early Christians eagerly awaited the return of Jesus in glory "to achieve the definitive triumph of good over evil," when he would judge the living and the dead. These prominent Scriptural themes form the basis of our Advent season.

- Isaiah 2:1-5,7:10-14,
- Jeremiah 33:14-16,
- Zephaniah 3:14-18,
- Micah 5:2-5a,
- Matthew 24:37-44,
- Romans 13:11-14
- Psalm 137
- Jeremiah 31:23ff
- Isaiah 9:1-7
- Jeremiah 23:5-6
- Matthew 2:6

Principal Themes

1. hope
2. darkness / light
3. repentance
4. watchfulness
5. preparation
6. expectation of the incarnation of Christ on Christmas
7. anticipation of the fullness of time at Christ's second coming

The season of Advent marks the beginning of a new church year, emphasizing a threefold coming of Christ:

- We celebrate His coming in HISTORY at Bethlehem,
- We celebrate His coming in MYSTERY through word and sacrament,
- We celebrate His coming in MAJESTY at the end of time. \hat{I}

FOUNDATIONS OF ADVENT - Advent Definition and Summary

The word "advent," from the Latin *adventus* (Greek *parousia*), means "coming" or "arrival." The season of Advent is focused on the "coming" of Jesus as Messiah (Christ or King). Our worship, scripture readings, and prayers not only prepare us spiritually for Christmas (his first coming), but also for his eventual second coming.

This is why the Scripture readings during Advent include both Old Testament passages related to the expected Messiah, and New Testament passages concerning Jesus' second coming as judge of all people. Also, passages about John the Baptist, the precursor who prepared the way for the Messiah, are read. All of these themes are present in Catholic worship during Advent,

When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (524).

Since Advent looks forward to Christ's birth and Incarnation, it is an appropriate way to begin the Church Year. However, Advent is not part of the Christmas season itself, but a preparation for it. Thus, we do not sing Christmas hymns, or use Christmas readings, in Mass until December 24th /25th..

KEY SPIRITUALITY CONCEPTS

1. During these four weeks, which begin on November 28th this year, we prepare not for the coming of Jesus (He has already come!) but for the celebration of the coming of the Light of the World at Christmas. Advent is a time of hope and joyful expectation.

2. During Advent we emphasize the joy that many would compare to the months before a child is born: excitement, wonder, and joy in expectation of the life that is in our midst right now, yet about to be born.
3. Advent offers a time to connect with our longing and hope for the saving presence of the one called Emmanuel (God-with-us.)
4. The Advent season offers us not the chance to "pretend" that Jesus has not been born, but rather to bring our experiences, hopes, and fears to the celebration of new life that is Christmas. We make room in our hearts, not for One who is absent, but for a renewed sense of wonder and awe at the gift of God's Incarnate love.

Secular culture and many churches celebrate the day of Christmas, but take it outside of the context of Advent and Christmastide. However, Christmas is not meant to be an isolated day, but a festival of the Incarnation in the midst of the Church year. Christmas is only properly understood after having the preparation provided by Advent. In the midst of the secular excesses leading up to Christmas, Advent provides a welcome solace and an opportunity to continually re-orient ourselves to God's will as we expectantly wait with patriarchs, prophets, and kings for the true meaning of Christmas: the Incarnation of God the Son.

History

The first clear reference to a celebration of Advent occurs in the 6th century. Prior to this time, there were celebrations and fasts resembling our current Advent season. St. Hilary of Poitiers (d. AD 367) and the Spanish Council of Saragossa (AD 380) spoke of a three week fast before Epiphany. Pope St. Leo the Great preached many homilies about "the fast of the tenth month (i.e. December)" prior to Christmas. The Gelasian Sacramentary (AD 750) provided liturgical material for the five Sundays before Christmas as well as Wednesdays and Fridays. The Western Church eventually settled on 4 Sundays of Advent, which has the season beginning at the very end of November or the very beginning of December, starting immediately after Ordinary Time. Until the 12th century, in many geographical areas, Advent had a more festive tone, and white vestments were still occasionally used. However, Advent became more closely related to Lent as Christ's second coming became more and more a prominent Advent theme, as especially seen in the seventh century Bobbio Missal. Advent proper is unknown in the East, although the Eastern Churches have a long fast before Christmas. This fast lasts longer than the Western Advent season and begins in mid-November. Advent, or the Eastern equivalent fast, is celebrated in all Catholic Anglican and Orthodox Churches.