

Advent: a Time of Preparation and Prayer

Advent, part of a joyous celebration that includes both Christmas and Epiphany, begins on Sunday, November 30th. It is a season of joyful hope and spiritual expectation; a time for preparation, prayer and generosity. Advent is a time of excitement, wonder, joy, and anticipation as well as an attentiveness to get things into order for Christmas. Like the excitement of awaiting the birth of a child, much preparation and anticipation awaits the joyful day. Just as the focal point for parents is the birth of their child, the focal point of the Christmas season for Christians is God becoming one of us in Jesus. During Advent and Christmas, we retell the story of Jesus' coming. God wanted to show us the depth of divine love so God sent us Jesus. Jesus entered into our humanity to bring us salvation, healing, and joy. In Jesus, God has come among us. The season draws to a close on Epiphany, January 6th; the Three Wise Men symbolize the whole human family for whom Christ was born.

Just as parents savour the anticipated birth of their child, we don't want to rush into the customs of Christmas before we savour the rituals connected to Advent. There are many customs and traditions that help us in this waiting period for Christmas. Advent calendars, songs such as "O Come, O Come Emmanuel, setting out an empty stable (creche) are some signs of preparation for the coming of Jesus. The Advent wreath is another tradition that gathers the family in a prayerful setting to reflect on the gifts that God had given us.

The traditional Advent wreath consists of evergreen branches formed into a circle with four candles representing the four weeks of Advent. The circular wreath is a sign of God's eternal love for us. The evergreen branches suggest the faithfulness of God, which is always alive and fresh. The four candles (three purple and one pink) represent the four weeks before Christmas.

The pink candle is lit on the third week as a symbol of rejoicing. Each week, as we light additional candles, the light gradually increases as we move closer to the coming of the Lord, the Light of the World.

A prayer to share with your family

**O God,
As light comes from this candle,
May the blessings of Jesus Christ come to us,
Warming our hearts and brightening our way.
May Christ the Saviour bring life
Into the darkness of this world.
Lord Jesus, fill us with your love, make us joyful in faith and hope and keep us safe
in your love.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

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