

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

Preparation, Expectation and Hope

The season of Advent is the first season of the Church year and begins four Sundays before Christmas Day. Long before Jesus' birth, the world waited and prepared for the promised Messiah. Prophets told of God's love -- that God would send the world a light to guide us. Each year during Advent, we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus and the first Christmas so many centuries ago.

The Meaning of Advent: The word "advent" means "coming" or "arrival". The birth of Jesus was the First Advent. The coming of Christ at the end of time will be the Second Advent. We also believe in the Third Advent -- the coming of Christ into our hearts now, and remaining in our hearts -- present in the world today.

The Advent Experience: Through our preparation, we experience a fulfillment of the expectation that Christ will be born anew in our hearts.

So, how do we prepare ourselves during Advent?

Symbols :

Liturgical Color At the beginning of Advent, the colors used in the church change to royal blue.

The Advent Wreath

Circle shape of the wreath reminds us of God's eternal and endless mercy, with no beginning and no end.

Greenery used to decorate the circle can represent many things: Ivy -- the human spirit clinging to God's strength; Cedar or Fir -- eternal life; Holly -- Jesus' crown of thorns.

Candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through Jesus. Four outer candles represent the period of waiting (the four Sundays in Advent). In our tradition, there are three blue candles -- blue symbolizes waiting and preparing; and one pink candle -- symbolizing joy. We light one candle on the first Sunday of Advent. Each succeeding week, an additional candle is lit. As the light grows brighter, we are reminded that the Light of the World will soon be here. On Christmas Eve, a white candle is added to the center of the wreath, symbolizing that the Light has come.

The Advent Wreath is lighted with prayer at the beginning of every Sunday service. At home, families may light a wreath before the evening meal, or at other times in expectation of Christmas.

Scripture:

Each week in church and Sunday School we will hear the Old Testament scriptures and prophecies foretelling the Messiah's coming.

The Jesse Tree

A small evergreen or bare tree branch can be set up during Advent. Symbols are made to decorate the tree and make it a tree of Jesse. Jesse lived over 3,000 years ago and was the father of David, the great king of Israel. Scripture tells us that Jesus was a descendant of the family of David. We remember some of Jesus' ancestors by making a symbol to represent each of them. The symbols and scripture verses are hung on the Jesse Tree.

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| Jesse | Branch | Isaiah 11:1 |
| Noah | Ark/Rainbow | Genesis 6:14-22 |
| Abraham | Stars | Genesis 15:5-6 |
| Sarah | Tent | Genesis 18: 9-14 |
| Isaac | Ram | Genesis 22: 13-14 |
| Rebekah | Camel | Genesis 24: 1-67 |
| Jacob | Ladder | Genesis 28:10-22 |
| Rachel | Shepherd Staff | Genesis 29: 1-20 |
| Joseph | Coat of Colors | Genesis 37 |
| Moses | Burning Bush | Exodus 3 |
| Miriam | Music | Exodus 15:20-21 |
| Deborah | Palm Tree | Judges 4: 4-5 |
| Gideon | Trumpet | Judges 7 |
| Ruth | Straw | Ruth 1: 15-18 |
| Samuel | Lamp | I Sam. 3:1-3 |
| David | Harp | I Sam. 16: 14-23 |
| Solomon | Temple | I Kings 1: 22-48 |
| Elijah | Altar & Fire | I Kings 18:30-35 |
| Hezekiah | Tablets of Law | 2 Kings 18: 1-6 |
| Josiah | Book | 2 Kings 23: 1-3 |
| Esther | Crown/Scepter | Esther 2: 1-18 |
| Isaiah | Flower | Isaiah 35: 1-2 |
| Daniel | Lion | Daniel 6: 1-24 |
| Jonah | Great Fish | Jonah 1 |
| Elizabeth | Dove | Luke 1:39-45 |
| John the Baptist | River | Matt: 3:1-6 |
| Mary | Mother/Child | Isaiah 7:14 |
| Jesus | Names | Isaiah 9:6 |

Prayer:

We offer prayers of devotion and commitment and ask for God's grace for those who walk in darkness.

Prayers for the Weeks of Advent

Advent Wreath Blessing: *God, by your word all things are made holy. We offer you this Advent Wreath. Bless it and by lighting it, help us to prepare to receive Jesus into our hearts with joy at the great Feast of Christmas.. Amen.*

First Week of Advent: *Merciful God, you sent prophets to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ. Help us to hear their message of great joy which was given for all people. Amen.*

Second Week of Advent: *God, be in our midst to cast away any darkness that separates us from you. In your mercy, forgive all the things should not have done or failed to do. Teach us to live in your light and walk in your ways. Amen.*

Third Week of Advent: *Blessed God, pour your love into our hearts to help us love all those you love. Help us to understand and respond to the needs of others, just as you understand and respond to the needs of all through Jesus. Amen.*

Fourth Week of Advent: *Loving God, as we prepare this last week to celebrate the birth of Jesus strengthen us to show greater respect, love and honor for all so that our world may be the just, peaceful and joyful place into which the Christ may come. Amen.*

Christmas Eve: *Most holy God, on this holiest of nights, as we light the pure white Christ Candle, may its brightness be reflected in our hearts and lives as we show forth your love in our lives. Amen.*

An Advent Reflection

In a 21st century world, bigger and better define expectations for much of life. Super size, super star, hi-def – it can be hard to see potential in the small things. It is humbling to read the Old Testament and see just how many of the Old Testament “super heroes” were imperfect. Abraham couldn’t believe the promise; Moses was impatient and didn’t want to wait on God; David was powerful, but flawed; Solomon – the unwise wise man. And then there was the young Jewish girl, from a small village.

Realizing that God often begins with the smallest things to yield greatness, gives us hope. Through preparation, prayer and faith – and if we don’t put limits on God – God will be revealed through us and we will be “super” in God’s eyes.

The wonder of Advent is that the incarnation of Jesus was to provide hope. Not in circumstances – because the reality is that bad things happen. But hope in God. Hope that God will come to us – again and again – to reveal a God of possibility and of new things. In Advent we contemplate that hope of newness, potential and possibility embodied, incarnated in a newborn baby

Experience tells us that those who have suffered and still hope understand that hope is about a way to live – not just survive – but live authentically amidst all of life’s problems and with a faith that continues to see possibility when there is no present evidence of it -- just because God is God. That is the wonder of Advent.

*Excerpt from “The Season of Advent”, Dennis Bratcher
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ADVENT 2011



Join Us During the Season of Advent

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| 11/27 | Advent Wreath Making | 9:15–10:15 am |
| 11/26 | Healing Support/Discussion | 10:00-11:30am |
| 12/3 | Healing Support/Discussion | 10:00-11:30am |
| 12/10 | Healing Support/Discussion | 10:00-11:30am |
| 12/17 | Healing Support/Discussion | 10:00-11:30am |
| 12/24 | Christmas Eve Service with Pageant | 5:00 pm |
| 12/24 | Christmas Eve Service | 10:30 pm |
| 12/25 | Christmas Day Service | 10:30 am |