

The season of Advent is upon us. Advent begins the Church's liturgical year, consisting of the four weeks prior to the celebration of Christmas. The word advent is derived from the Latin *adventus*, which means "coming" or "arrival". In the societies of the Roman Empire, the word *adventus* referred to the arrival of a person of dignity and great power—a king or an emperor, for example. For Christians, Advent is the time when the Church patiently prepares for the coming of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

We celebrate the coming of Christ in three ways: We celebrate the first coming at his birth; we celebrate his present and continual coming among us; and finally, we look forward with hope and expectation to his second coming, when he will come to judge the living and the dead on the Last Day.

Advent's four Sundays are arranged to concentrate on different aspects of Christ's coming. The first Sunday of Advent deals with the second coming of Christ. The second Sunday of Advent introduces the prophetic message of John the Baptist, the one who urged Israel to prepare for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. The third Sunday of Advent focuses on the content of John the Baptist's preaching, especially his call to repentance and the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. The fourth Sunday of Advent gives attention to the miracle of Christ's conception in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Advent wreath (used in churches and Christian homes) is one of the most popular symbols used by Christians during the season of Advent. Three purple candles and one rose-colored candle are used. The purple signifies that Advent is a season of repentance as well as expectation. A candle is lit on the first Sunday of Advent, with another one lit on each succeeding Sunday. The joyfully rose-colored candle is reserved for the third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete*, which means "rejoice" in Latin, is the opening word of the Introit for that Sunday: "Rejoice... the Lord is near" (Phillipians 4:4).

While the rest of secular society is already caught up in the frantic holiday shopping, decorations, and parties, the Church takes pause during Advent to contemplate the wonder of God's mercy and love in Jesus Christ. God's people prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord by exercising the disciplines of Advent: confession and repentance, prayer, scripture reading, and fasting.

Advent invites us to assess our lives and to make the necessary changes in the light of the approaching Christmas celebration. The scripture readings, the symbols of Advent, and the reception of Holy Communion are evidence of the Lord's abiding presence and a sign of his promise to bring us salvation.

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