

ADVENT

ADVENT is a period of PREPARATION, extending over four Sundays, before Christmas.

The word Advent comes from the Latin advenio, "to come to," and refers to the coming of Christ. This refers to:

1. our celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas
2. the coming of Christ in our lives through grace and the Sacrament of Holy Communion
3. His Second Coming at the end of time.

LITTLE LENT: Advent has traditionally been known as a "little Lent." As in Lent, Advent should be marked by increased prayer, fasting, & good works. Traditionally, all great feasts have been preceded by a time of fasting, which makes the feast itself more joyful. Sadly, Advent today has been supplanted by "the Christmas shopping season," so that by Christmas Day, many people no longer enjoy the feast.

ADVENT SYMBOLISM at MASS: In its symbolism, the Church stresses the penitential & preparatory nature of Advent. As during Lent, priests wear purple vestments, & the Gloria ("Glory to God") is omitted during Mass. The only exception is on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday, when priests can wear rose-colored vestments. As on Laetare Sunday during Lent, this exception is designed to encourage us to continue our prayer & fasting, because we can see that Advent is more than halfway over.

Most Christians today spend the entire season of Advent celebrating Christmas rather than preparing for it. We can better enjoy Christmas – all 12 days of it, from Christmas Day to Epiphany – if we revive Advent as a period of preparation.

Here are some traditions you may want to try to revive your family's Advent:

NOVEMBER 15 **PHILLIP'S FAST:** While the Western Church no longer has a set requirement for fasting during Advent, the Eastern Church, both Catholic and Orthodox, continues to observe what is known as Philip's Fast, from November 15 until Christmas. We can observe Philip's Fast by doing the same sorts of things we do during Lent--abstaining from meat (especially on Fridays), not eating between meals, restricting the amount of food that we eat. Combined with almsgiving (this time of year is particularly hard for the poor) and efforts to increase our prayer, we can begin to return Advent to its proper role as a season of preparation.

1st Sunday HOPE - light the Prophet's Candle on your advent wreath.

ADVENT WREATH: Perhaps the best-known of all Advent symbols is the Advent wreath, a custom which originated among German Lutherans but was soon adopted by Catholics. Consisting of 4 candles (3 purple and 1 pink) arranged in a circle with evergreen boughs and a 5th, white candle in the center, the Advent wreath corresponds to the 4 Sundays of Advent. The purple candles represent the penitential nature of the season, the pink candle calls to mind the respite of Gaudete Sunday, and the white candle represents Christ.

JESSE TREE: The Jesse Tree represents the family tree, or genealogy of Jesus Christ. It tells the story of God's salvation plan, beginning with creation & continuing through the Old Testament, to the coming of the Messiah. The name comes from Isaiah 11:1, "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, & a branch from his roots will bear fruit." (NASB) . Each day of Advent a homemade ornament is added to the Jesse Tree, a small tree made of evergreen branches.

DECEMBER 6 **ST. NICHOLAS:** The true story of Santa Claus begins when Nicholas' wealthy parents died in an epidemic while he was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you have & give to [the] poor" (Mt 19:21), Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick & the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God & was appointed bishop of Myra while still a young man.

On the evening of Dec. 5, place shoes outside bedroom doors or on the hearth. See that a candy treat appears by morning on Dec. 6.

ADVENT

DECEMBER 8



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION: On this Holy Day of obligation, we celebrate the fact that Mary, the Mother of God, was herself conceived immaculate in her mother's womb.

The "immaculate" conception means that when Joachim and Anne (Mary's parents) cooperated with God in bringing a new life into the world, God set this one particular child to be separate (one of the connotations of the word "holy") from all other descendants of Adam and Eve, in that she would be born without the stain of Original Sin. By this extraordinary act of divine intervention, the Mother of God would be an absolutely pure vessel by which the pure Light of Men could enter the world. Since Jesus is the unblemished Lamb of God, and Mary is His only natural parent (His sinless flesh came from her alone), it is only logical that she too had to be completely pure, even from her conception in her mother's womb.

2nd Sunday

LOVE - light the Bethlehem Candle on your advent wreath.

DECEMBER 13

ST. LUCY: Lucy's feast originally coincided with the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year before calendar reforms, so her feastday has become a festival of light. This is particularly seen in the Scandinavian countries, with their long dark winters. There, a young girl dressed in a white dress and a red sash (as the symbol of martyrdom) carries palms and wears a crown or wreath of candles on her head. In Sweden, girls dressed as Lucy carry rolls and cookies in procession as songs are sung. So light some candles and bake some cookies!

3rd Sunday

JOY - Gaudete Sunday - light the Shepherd's Candle (pink) on your advent wreath.

DECEMBER 16

LAS POSADAS: Posadas, a word that means "shelter" or "lodging," is an Advent custom in Mexico. It re-enacts Mary and Joseph's search for lodging as they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The Posadas takes place over 9 days, Dec. 16-24, which symbolizes the 9 months of Mary's pregnancy. People go from house to house seeking lodging, but the "innkeepers" refuse to let them stay. On Christmas Eve, the travelers are finally welcomed at the last house where they celebrate the birth of Jesus.

NATIVITY SCENE: Today's families can adapt the Los Posadas tradition using the figures from their Nativity Scene to re-enact Mary and Joseph's journey to the stable in Bethlehem. Start with an empty stable. Place the figures of Mary and Joseph on the other side of the room and move them closer to the crèche each day. On Christmas Eve add Baby Jesus, the angels and the shepherds. Then let the Wise Men begin their journey to the crèche so they arrive on the feast of the Epiphany.

CHRISTMAS NOVENA: Pray a Christmas novena, starting 9 days before Christmas.

DECEMBER 17

"O" ANTIPHONS!: These 7 jewels of our liturgy date back to the 4th century, one for each day until Christmas Eve. These antiphons address Christ with 7 magnificent Messianic titles, based on the Old Testament prophecies & types of Christ. Each evening after lighting the Advent candles, recite or sing these antiphons, then read the pertinent scripture passages.

4th Sunday

PEACE - light the Angel's Candle on your advent wreath.

DECEMBER 24

CHRISTMAS TREE: Holding off on putting up the Christmas tree & other decorations is another way to remind ourselves during the Advent Season that the feast is not here yet.

Traditionally, Catholics did not put up their Christmas trees until after noon on Christmas Eve and they would not be taken down until after Epiphany, in order to celebrate the Christmas season to its fullest. The same was true of all Christmas decorations. The purpose of the tree & the decorations is to celebrate the feast of Christmas. By putting them up early, Christmas loses some of its sense of joyfulness when it finally does arrive.