

Celebrating the Season of Advent

This weekend we began our journey through Advent.

The word Advent is from the Latin *adventus* for "coming" and is associated with the four weeks of preparation for Christmas. Advent always contains four Sundays, beginning on the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, (November 30) and continuing until December 24. It is not a penitential season like Lent, but rather is a season of joyful waiting; a time of the thinking of our preparation for the Second and Final Coming of the Lord, called the Parousia, and a joyful theme of getting ready for the Bethlehem event where we remember Christ's coming into the world as an infant.

Since the 900s Advent has been considered the beginning of the Church year. The year we are now entering into is called "Year C" in the three year cycle of readings; Matthew being year "A"; Mark being year "B" and Luke being year "C." These cycles are a result of the Second Vatican Council, which ordered a change in the Sunday readings at Mass so that Catholics would become more familiar with the text of the Bible. As a result we now have a three-year cycle of readings built around readings from the three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Readings from John's Gospel get worked into all 3 years at various points.

The traditional color of Advent is purple or violet, however the color can be different from the color used during Lent. This is because Advent is not a penitential season; Lent is. Therefore, it is a blueish shade of purple or lighter purple. You'll notice the blue mixed in with the violet in our sanctuary.

The Advent Wreath

Customarily the Advent Wreath is constructed of a circle of evergreen branches into which are inserted four candles. According to tradition, three of the candles are violet and the fourth is rose. The rose candle is lit the third Sunday of Advent, for this color anticipates and symbolizes the Christmas joy announced in the first word of the Entrance Antiphon: "Rejoice" (Latin, *Gaudete*). Rose color vestments are used too (though I won't be offended if you call them pink). We also use Rose Colored vestments on the Fourth Sunday of Lent; both those days symbolize kind of a turning of the corner as we approach the upcoming feasts of Christmas and Easter. As Christmas gets closer, the light from the candles increases, symbolizing the light of Christ, dispelling the darkness.

What to do during the season?

Advent is perhaps the most perplexing of all seasons we celebrate, because it does not really feel like we celebrate it much. Ash Wednesday starts Lent, and you know you are in Lent; you literally have ashes on your forehead. The weather is still cold, and we don't have Easter songs being sung on radio or a ton of Easter gifts to buy. Christmas seemingly starts back around Thanksgiving (or Halloween?) and while it is to be a season of anticipation and getting ready for Christmas, let's be realistic. We have a lot going on; we have people to shop for, work can be quite busy, cards have to be sent

out, and it's a stressful time. What then is the best way to celebrate the season? My view is that we need to wait actively.

While we are looking forward to celebrating Christmas, really the Christmas event has already happened. Christ has come the first time. But, he will come again. Remember those words the priest says during the Our Father: "...as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ." What does this waiting look like?

For one, think about how you can see God better during this time. We can think about where our energies are going, and what is our goal. The answer is not to have our kids be perfect at sports, to have the perfect gift, or the perfect job. It is of course heaven.

Thus, Advent recalls the Lord's first coming, his final return, and his presence among us now in the life of the Church. We can see God better by making more time for God; by praying as a family or alone; by making Mass a priority; by celebrating confession. Find a kind of spirituality that works for you, and use it. It could be the rosary; or reading a chapter from the Bible each night, or just spending five minutes in conversation with God using a prayer we like or a prayer from our heart. We should make sure that while there was no room for Jesus when He came into the world the first time, there is room in our hearts for him to come to us.

I'd say this also includes thinking about how we can see God in one another, and bring God to one another. Many of course did not recognize Jesus when He came the first time. Sometimes we can forget how we called to love one another as God has loved us. Remember, Jesus came for all people. As we all know, some people can be hard to love in life. We are hurt by others; we get angry with people who are our political opposites; we can be quick to judge based on race or the uniform someone wears. As we prepare for celebrating the birth of our Lord, the season is a great time to think about just who He came for too, and how we can strive to emulate our Lord by being a beacon of hope, kindness and love to one another.

Advent also reminds us to live each day in preparation for Christ's return. As Christians, we do that by reminding the world that Christ is not distant and far away, but alive. Waiting can often be seen as a negative thing; or something we just do passively, but really the Christian is to wait actively for the day Christ will return, or we will encounter Him. Advent is also about hope; and the Christian doesn't just hope for heaven, but uses hope to make the world a better place. We do that through actions.

One is buying gifts. Gift buying is appropriate; just so long as it doesn't become an obsession or cause undue financial strain. As kids we wait for Santa; but we find as we age it is much more fun to be Santa. Do we have to break the bank and shop? No; but gifts often have thought put into them. But as we do that, perhaps we can also buy a gift for someone in need (you may have seen our Advent gift tree for instance in the narthex). It's a great way to also teach younger people in our family how we think of others than ourselves. We can also give the gift of our time too. Even taking the time to write a personal note in a card can be very meaningful as it says to a person "I care

about you.” As we do these things, it means we are people not just of action, but we use Advent to help people see God.

One final note: Also occurring during Advent is a Holy Day of Obligation, the Immaculate Conception, which we celebrate Wednesday, December 8th I was actually in my 20s, and may have been in seminary, before I realized this day celebrated the conception of Mary, not Jesus! We have beautiful readings on this feast, including in Luke’s Gospel where the Angel Gabriel visits Mary, and tells her to not be afraid. We also see her remarkable trust in God, as she says “May it be done to me according to your word.”

I hope you have a blessed Advent Season as you prepare for Christmas. The Season gives us the chance to reflect upon the fact that while we may get some nice things under the tree, the greatest gift has already been given to us - God Himself, coming as a frail infant born in a manger, and it gives us the time to think about how we can give that gift to one another throughout the upcoming new year.

God bless,

Fr. Paul