

Celebrating the Season of Advent

This weekend we began our journey through Advent.

Admittedly sometimes Advent can be hard to get a feel for. As the days get darker I put up all my Christmas decorations and lights (why just keep them in the basement?) to brighten up the house; most people are in "Christmas" mode starting with Thanksgiving as we send out the cards, buy the gifts and have Christmas music everywhere. It's a far cry from Lent which has much more of a feel and no one really gets into Easter before the Easter Candle is lit.

Advent though is a beautiful season where we can also get a little bit into Christmas with what I'd call a "joyful waiting," where we get ready for what is to come.

On that waiting part: 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 but a season of joyful waiting; a time of the liturgical theme of preparation for the Second and Final Coming of the Lord, called the Parousia, and a joyful theme of getting ready for the Bethlehem event.

Since the 900s Advent has been considered the beginning of the Church year.

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 and I always wear them on the two days of the year I can (the other being 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?

Think of Advent as a great way to "actively wait."

For one, think about how you can see God better during this time. What is your ultimate 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. Our confession service will be December 5th, a Monday night and I'll have added time the last two Saturdays of Advent too starting at 3 p.m. 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.

Secondly, Advent 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 of love throughout the year; making a meal; cleaning the house; doing chores. For many of us it's buying gifts or making a gift for someone too; but it's also the gift of our time that we can give throughout the year; and, as I shared last week in this space, the gift of ourselves - just being together as family and doing things for one another means so much.

One final note: Also occurring during Advent is a Holy Day of Obligation, the Immaculate Conception, which we celebrate this Thursday, December 8th. This celebrates Mary's conception (understandably many might think it's that of Jesus, but that is March 25th). 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." Again, the Visitation readings being a great reminder of how our presence in the lives of others do so much to bring joy to our friends and family.

I hope you have a blessed Advent Season as you prepare for Christmas. While we might prepare to open things in packages, of course the greatest gift is that of our Lord, and what a great gift we give when we give the love He has given us not just one day of the year but every day. Let's use this season to think about how we can do just that in a better way.

God bless,

Fr. Paul