

Advent Practices

Over the centuries people have developed customs which help us to live according to the spirit of this season. You may want to try one or more of these in your home.

Advent wreath. A wreath of evergreens with four candles is prepared. One candle is lighted on the first Sunday, and one more on each of the following Sundays.

Jesse tree. A branch (cf. *Jer* 23.5) or large plant (cf. *Is* 11.1) is decorated with symbols of Christ's ancestors. As each is prepared and hung, the story of this person is told.

Advent calendar. We may make a calendar to mark the days as we move gradually to the celebration of our Saviour's coming.

Cards. When buying and sending Christmas cards, we make sure they reflect the meaning of the feast. It is the birth of Christ – not of Santa, reindeer, puppies, or snowmen – that we are celebrating.

Decorations. Our home decorations may include a cross of lights in the window or near the tree.

Gifts. Instead of being caught up in a whirl of spending, consider giving presents that you yourself make, knit, sew, cook, draw, write or construct. Give a book that will lead a person to reflect a little more. Make a donation to a worthy cause in someone's name. Write, call or visit someone who is sick or shut-in.

Preparing the crib. During the last few days before Christmas, we may prepare the crib in a place of honour in our home. It remains empty; the figures are not placed in it until Christmas comes.

Joy and Hope

Advent is season of joy and hope for all who follow Jesus. We must be careful not to lose sight of the true meaning of the season as the world around us hustles to buy and sell, to have parties and plan vacations. Advent is a time to renew our life in Christ and to thank God for saving us in Jesus; it is a season for asking God to save all people and for praying for peace in the world.

During Advent, we are invited to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord – to wait in joyful hope for his return in glory at the end of time and to prepare for the annual celebration of his birth.

Dying to sin: We strive to die to sin and selfishness and to obey the Father's will.

Living for God: We set out to love God each day by loving and serving others.

This is the way in which Jesus wants us to make a straight way for him in our hearts as we await his coming.

*Lord Jesus, our brother and our Saviour,
come into our hearts with your love,
with your joy, your hope, and your peace.*

*Help us to reflect your love for all
by loving and serving all we meet.*

*Lord Jesus,
come into our lives,
and share your gifts with all people.*

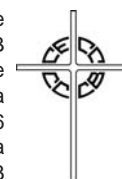
*Blessed are you, Lord Jesus,
forever and ever. Amen!*

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We look forward with joy
to the coming of Jesus

National Liturgy Office
CCCB
2500 Don Reid Drive
Ottawa, ON. K1H 2J2 Canada
Copyright © Concacan Inc., 1987, 2002, 2006
E-mail: liturgy@cccbb.ca
Phone: 1-613.241.9461 Ext. 223



What Is Advent?

Advent, from Latin *Adventus*, means coming. During the four weeks before Christmas we look forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as king and judge at the end of time and to our Christmas celebration of his coming as our Saviour 2,000 years ago.

Coming at the end of time. As Christians we are sent to build up God's kingdom on earth. We do this by living each day as his people: by working and praying, by obeying God's will and by suffering with Christ. At the end of time, Jesus will come to judge our efforts and to hand over to the Father the kingdom he has built with our help.

During the first weeks of Advent (up to December 16) we reflect on Christ as our coming king and our judge; we wait in joyful hope for his return in glory (the *parousia*) to complete his work on earth.

Coming as our Saviour. Beginning on December 17, we join with the prophets and the people of God who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. We express our longing for God's mercy, and grow more aware of our need for this saving help.

Preparation: Advent is a period of four weeks of prayer and preparation, of renewal and of looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus among us, his beloved people.

During Advent our prayer is one of hope and love: Come, Lord Jesus!

Advent saints: Three saints are special friends during Advent: Mary, Joseph and John the Baptist are good examples of faith. They believed what God said and lived each day for the Lord, who was always ready to help them. We ask these saints to help us to prepare the way for Jesus in our life.

Spirit of the Season

A season of renewal: During Advent, we express our great longing for God. Who are we without God? Apart from Christ we can do nothing (cf. *Jn* 15.5). We prepare ourselves and wait for God's coming.

Prepare the way of the Lord. We open our hearts to Jesus in prayer, and show by our actions each day that we are his. We try to love other people more, and to be more patient and understanding. We pray for others, especially those who are close to us, and ask God to help them to grow in love.

A time to change. During Advent we are invited to change our lives and our hearts. God wants us to prepare for his coming by doing good. Each day we should look at our faults and weaknesses and ask our Father to help us to follow Jesus more closely.

A season of hope: Advent brings hope, because Jesus is always ready to help us to grow. He has conquered sin and selfishness by his obedient death and by his rising; he can help us to change our lives for the better. If we want to grow closer to him, and pray and work to improve, Jesus will help us to change for him.

A season of joy: Advent brings joy. We are followers of Jesus, who is the king of glory. We are happy because he is our king, and we are his brothers and sisters. We rejoice because God is our dear Father and because the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts. We are happy because Jesus wants to give us his peace and let us share his joy now and in heaven forever.

Not a time of penance. Advent is not a time of penance like Lent. It is a season of renewal, when God invites us to let Jesus come into our hearts and make us more like him. It is a season of quiet expectation; we live it in the expectation of the fullness of joy to come.

Spiritual Renewal

Advent is a time for renewing our lives as followers of Jesus. We are invited to "make straight the way of the Lord" in our hearts and in our lives. Here are some practical suggestions for you and your family to consider:

Prayer: Why not try to begin or improve your prayer as individuals and as a family? Each of us could begin and end the day in prayer. As a family, we could pray together at least once a day. Try to pray grace before and after meals. Read the daily gospel reading and pray about it.

We may use these prayers during Advent:

The Lord's prayer, especially. "May your kingdom come" and "your will be done".

Canticle of Zechariah (Lk 1.68-79). We praise God for sending Jesus to save us.

Ps 25 and Ps 85 are used often in the liturgy of this season.

Glory to the Father... We offer this prayer of praise to the Trinity living in our hearts.

Hail, Mary. Based in part on *Lk* 1.28 and 42, this prayer ends with a petition for all people.

Eucharist: As well as taking part in the Sunday celebration, why not try to go to Mass more often during Advent? If someone is sick at home, arrange to have Communion brought several times during this season.

Penance celebrations: In preparation for Christmas, it is good to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. A penance celebration is usually held in each parish and community to help us reflect on our life and come to repentance. We may celebrate the sacrament at the same celebration or at a later time.