

A Word About Worship

Advent

Advent, from adventus, “coming” is the season of the church year comprising the four Sundays before Christmas Day. The first Sunday in Advent annually begins the church year. Advent is traditionally focused on the coming of Christ at the end of time as well as Christ’s birth in Bethlehem two millennia ago.

Even though there are sprinklings of Christmas lighting appearing, even though a few neighbors on our street put up Christmas decorations, like clockwork, on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, and even though Santa’s and trees and stockings have been on sale since before Halloween, Advent is about waiting.

- Waiting for Christ to return “in glory to judge the living and the dead.”
- Waiting for God to appear in the least likely places and times—perhaps as a fatherless Jewish child born to an unwed couple while traveling far from home.

And I’ll be the first to admit, my “waiting skills” need a bit of brushing up at least once a year. I know this when an inner voice is saying, “Cut to the chase” or “Just do it” or I have a hankering for fast food, because it’s just that--Fast Food!

However, the rhythm of the church year calendar is different.

- Christmas lasts 12 days—and it is preceded by the season of waiting called Advent.
- Easter last 50 days—but first we wait for it during the long late winter and early spring season of Lent.

The church calendar is organized into three major sections:

- The Nativity Cycle (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany)
- The Resurrection Cycle (Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost)
- And between them the Season After Pentecost, what Roman Catholics call the season of Ordinary Time, which ends with Advent One.

The Nativity Cycle begins the new church year. And we begin with a special kind of waiting during Advent.

- **Preparation**—a time to heed the Prophet’ demands for repentance—turning around and away from mistakes and missteps, working on changing those things that we have done that have hurt others and ourselves and still do; as well as those things that we ought to have done, but still procrastinate and neglect to do.
- **Renewed commitment**—The Collect for the First Sunday in Advent admonishes us to “cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” And two weeks later, affectionately called ‘Stirrup Sunday’, the Collect prays: “Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us.”

- **Anticipation** of both God's coming among us as the child in the manger, the Incarnation, and as the One whose "Kingdom shall have no end," the Christ who is yet to return at the end of the age.

Advent encourages us to cultivate anew the awe and wonder of the child—as we wait for that child of Bethlehem to be born anew in the hearts of each of us. We wait like a child, for a Child.

The spirituality of Advent begins our journey toward Epiphany, which comes at the end of the Nativity Cycle of the church year—the commemoration of revealing Jesus as the Christ to all the world, beginning with the Magi, who like us have undertaken the long journey of Advent and followed it to its end.

May we, like those "wise men" of old, have a wondrous journey through the seasons of Advent—waiting in preparation, with renewed commitment and childlike anticipation. **NLJ+**