

Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY



Jesus is Coming!

This year the season of Advent begins on Sunday, December 3rd. Advent is the four weeks that we set aside for preparing our hearts before the annual celebrations of Christ's birth on Christmas. The Incarnation – God becoming man – is the turning point of history. Our Heavenly Father loves us so much that He promised to send us a Savior after the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. And He kept His promise. The Son of God was born in Bethlehem in order to give His life for us on the cross so that our sins can be forgiven, so that we “may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) Living life to the full means knowing the truth, having a relationship with Jesus in prayer and being united with Him in the Sacraments. This is no small matter, and of course, we want to take this time of preparation during Advent seriously.

It is interesting to note that the word Advent means “comings” and it actually has a threefold character:

- 1) as a season that directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time.
- 2) as a season to prepare us for Christmas - Christ's first coming to us
- 3) and as a season in which we seek a deeper awareness of Jesus' coming to us, present in each moment of every day – as indeed, He is Emmanuel, “God with us”; He comes to us most especially in the Holy Eucharist.

The Readings from the Sacred Scriptures during the four Sundays of Advent assist us to focus our attention on these “comings.” The **First Sunday of Advent** emphasizes Christ's Second Coming, (which is also the ongoing theme for weekday Masses until December 16th). The Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent is Mark 13:33-37 and we see the theme of the Second Coming in Jesus' words: “Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake! You do not know when the appointed time will come.” His words are calling us to be watchful in prayer, to be ready for the Lord to come again. This is not meant to be about fear or worry but we are to “wait in joyful hope.”

For this time of waiting, the Advent Wreath draws a family together around the lighting of one of the four candles, each representing a week of this season. It is a special time to pray a Rosary, or a decade of the Rosary, and focus on the Joyful Mysteries that call to mind the events of Christ's birth. Before Mass, in the missalette, read slowly the words of the hymn,

O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and then try to sing it often— maybe in the shower if you can't “carry a tune”! The acoustics of this particular place are good for any voice.

The Gospel for the **Second Sunday of Advent** is Mark 1:1-8 and the distinctive theme is John the Baptist. John was sent as a messenger to prepare for the coming of the Savior. John was “...a herald's voice in the desert crying, make ready the way of the Lord.”

A great way to prepare our hearts for Christ's coming is to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It brings peace to the mind and soul to set aside the busyness of the season, quiet down with an examination of conscience and receive God's grace through this Sacrament of healing and forgiveness. This cleansing and ‘making room’ for the Lord prepares us to receive all that He wants to give us.

The Gospel for the **Third Sunday of Advent** is John 1:6-8, 19-28. The focus of the Reading is again on John the Baptist: “There was a man named John sent by God who came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe.” John the Baptist wanted to relate to others what he knew to be true; that Christ is the Light of the world. If we follow Jesus, we won't have to walk in darkness, because we will have the Light of Truth that leads to eternal life.

This theme of light is also apparent in creation. The days of Advent are the darkest days of the year. On December 21, we will experience the winter solstice which marks the shortest day and longest night. And then as we approach Christmas it begins to reverse, with more light and longer days, pointing to the birth of the Christ Child – the true Light shining in the darkness.

As we string up Christmas lights on the tree and on the house, we want to remember that these lights refer to Christ who is the Light of the world. Further, it is important to allow the Light of Christ to shine from our hearts. Let us ask God for one small way to share the Light He has placed in our hearts such as visiting a lonely person.

In the same way that John bore witness to Jesus Christ through telling others about Him, let us speak about the real meaning

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of Christmas with others and invite people to come to Mass on the Sundays of Advent and on Christmas. We need to welcome people back to our family celebrations in which we hear the Word of God and receive the Holy Eucharist – the same Christ Child born in a manger in Bethlehem.



The Gospel for the **Fourth Sunday of Advent** is Luke 1:26-38. Now the Readings turn our focus to the events surrounding the birth of the Savior. The angel Gabriel announces, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall name Him Jesus... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the Child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God... for nothing will be impossible for God.” The words of the angel remind us that Advent is a season of HOPE. We are not to be afraid, for with God, nothing is impossible.

These words can seem like nice thoughts but how is it possible to have this gift of hope? One telling example stands out in the life of Saint John Paul II. When he first became pope, he spoke to the crowds these very words: “do not be afraid!” How could he have such hope when the Holy Father, in his native Poland, had lived through the invasion by the Nazi’s and the killing of most everyone that he knew during World War II? In the aftermath of the War it was held that the ‘Iron Curtain’ would never come down. Through Pope John Paul’s prayer, unwavering trust in God, and his perseverance in calling for its destruction, we witnessed the downfall of this blockade to freedom without a shot being fired.

The season of Advent is a time to grow in the virtue of hope – to not be afraid. One way is to commit to pray three Hail Mary’s with a specific intention in mind, something that heretofore might even have seemed impossible. We will want to ask Our Lady to pray with us, as she is one who experienced the “impossible”. Mary, Mother of the Christ Child, will intercede for us. Let us ask her to prepare our hearts to receive the true Gift of Christmas—Christ Himself—in a much deeper way, as she was the first to receive Him as a newborn Babe on Christmas Day.

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