

Prayer Changes Things

Preparing for Christmas



Taking time during Advent to prepare ourselves spiritually can result in a truly meaningful Christmas Day and Christmas Season, celebrating the birth of the most important Person in all of history: Jesus Christ. The traditional customs of our Catholic Faith provide us with important ways to prepare our hearts to welcome the Christ Child.

Advent means coming and the four weeks leading up to Christmas are to be different than our ordinary routine. Yet it is not meant to be a time of celebration, as that really begins on Christmas Eve. Advent is to be spent preparing our hearts for the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to save us from sin and eternal death. This focus of spiritual preparation and joyful anticipation can be difficult to maintain in the hectic hustle and bustle of the materialistic side of this sacred season.

An important point for Advent is to keep everything simple by placing a limit on shopping and baking, while setting aside time for quiet prayer and for simply being with family members. Most of us don't need more gifts, but rather more time with each other. It is an opportunity to gather the family and prepare by remembering the darkness that pervaded the time of

the people of God as they awaited the birth of the Savior.

One traditional custom is the Advent wreath, which helps us to stay focused on this time of preparation and can be assembled by using evergreen limbs from a tree in the yard and four candles. The evergreens, which retain their green, vibrant life through the year, signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life found in Christ who was victorious over sin and death through His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent. The light of the candles shines in the darkness, which is most evident during this time of the year as it is darker due to shorter daylight hours. We use candles in the Advent wreath and put lights on a Christmas tree, signifying the coming of Christ who is "the Light that came into the world" to dispel the darkness of sin and to radiate the truth and love of God. Jesus is the Light of the world!

Specific times of quiet prayer are important during Advent. One way is to look at the Scripture Readings for Christmas, pondering the words and allowing the Holy Spirit to make a connection between the reading and your own life. If you are interested in a simple Prayer Card with the Scriptures surrounding

Christmas, go to diolc.org/deeper and click on "Praying with Scripture".

The words of Advent hymns provide the story of the first Christmas and stir our hearts with their beautiful melodies. Some of the best-known Advent hymns are "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"; "O Come, Divine Messiah"; "Lo, How a Rose Ere Blooming" and "Creator of the Stars of Night." The words can be found on the internet and used for a time of peaceful meditation.

Receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation / Confession during Advent frees us from the effects of sin, such as selfishness, anger, lack of forgiveness, guilt, bitterness. As our hearts are purified, there is more room for Christ to bring us His joy.

Acts of Charity also need to be part of our preparations for Christmas. We can give to our favorite charity; pray for the persecuted Christians in the Middle East and even donate so that they will have housing in time for winter; visit an elderly neighbor; send a Christmas card to a friend; show kindness to the person we find hardest to love. Above all, we can spend more time with family.

The preparation of our hearts for Christmas will make the coming of Emmanuel – God with us – mean so much more. We will then receive the Christ Child in Holy Communion in such a way as to transform our lives to be more joyful and hopeful!

By Ann Lankford

