



Advent

Preparing Your Heart for Christmas

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

Advent, which means *coming*, is the four weeks leading up to Christmas. This time is to be different than our ordinary routine. It is not meant to be a time of celebration, as that really begins on Christmas Eve. An important point for Advent is to keep everything simple. That is, do not try to do too much shopping or baking, but take time for being with family members and to pray together. Advent is to be spent preparing our hearts spiritually 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.

During Advent we sing beautiful hymns, such as *Come O Long Expected Jesus* and *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. In this holy season, we can ask Jesus to come and heal one area of difficulty in our lives. We need His help. In joyful expectation, we can trust that Jesus will help us with our struggle.

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

We can arrive ten minutes early for Sunday (or Saturday evening) Mass, to read the Bible passages from the missalette. The Readings walk us through the steps of God's unfolding plan to send His Son as our Savior. In pondering the Scriptures, it is helpful to choose a word or phrase that stood out and think about the reason why this caught your attention.

The Advent wreath, with its rich symbolism, helps us to stay focused on this time of preparation. A wreath can be assembled by simply using evergreen limbs from a tree in the yard and four candles. The wreath made of evergreens – which retain their green, vibrant life throughout the year - signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, with 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 own 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 which is darker due to shorter daylight hours. We use candles in the Advent wreath and put lights on a Christmas tree and

possibly on and around our homes, signifying the coming of Christ Who is the Light of the world. After all, **Christ is “the Light that came into the world” to dispel the darkness of sin and to radiate the truth and love of God** (See John 3:19-21).

The Advent wreath contains three purple candles and one rose candle. The purple candles symbolize the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and good works undertaken at this time. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday, the day of rejoicing, because we have arrived at the midpoint of Advent, when our preparation is now half over and we are close to Christmas. The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of His second coming to judge the living and the dead. In family practice, the Advent wreath is most appropriately lit at dinner time and some prayers prayed together as a family.

The preparation of our heart for Christmas will make the coming of Emmanuel – God with us – mean so much more. We will be blessed with the grace to know that Jesus is truly our Savior. And, receiving the Christ Child in Holy Communion will be the highlight of our Christmas Day.

Bv Ann Lankford



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