



Advent

The beginning of our liturgical year



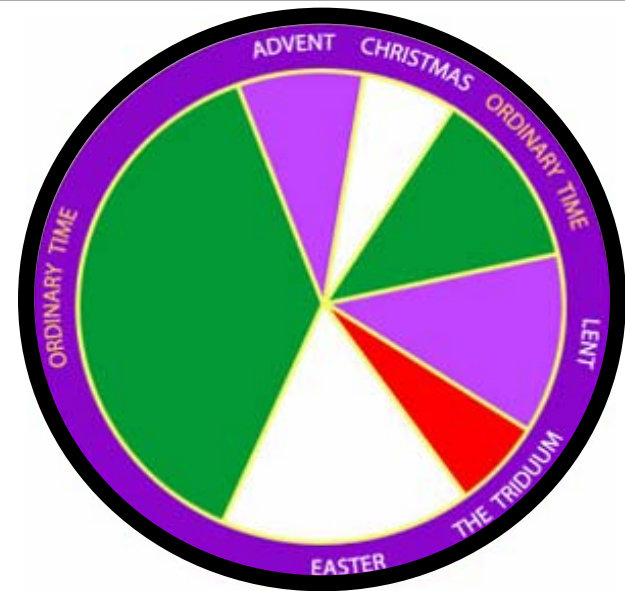
Advent

The days in the northern hemisphere get shorter and shorter, the dark nights get longer and longer.

During Advent we hope for a future full of life and light. We use this time to pray and reflect on our lives, our work, and our place in the Kingdom of God.

When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for His second coming.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #524



[Celebrate Advent!](#)

[Keeping it in the Home](#)

[Resources](#)

Did You Know?

Only the Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us the stories of Jesus' birth

Celebrate Advent

Advent is a season of waiting, hope, and conversion of heart.

Watchful waiting as we remember Jesus' birth in a stable and the miracle of God becoming a humble man to teach us how to live. We also await, with eager anticipation, His glorious Second Coming.

Joyful hope because we know that salvation has already been accomplished by Christ. (*Rm 8:24-25*) We continue to hope the world will mature and reach its fullness, thereby granting us what is promised by faith, and "we shall become like Him for we shall see Him as He really is." (*John 3:2*)

Conversion of our hearts the way the last great prophet of the Old Covenant, St. John the Baptist, instructed, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (*Mt 3:2*)



Vladimir Madonna



Watchful Waiting

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Watchful Waiting

A family expects the coming of a baby. They count the days until the bundle of joy will arrive, ready or not.

During Advent we also wait for the birth of a very special Baby. In the meantime, we have to shop for gifts, attend all the parties of the season, and do more cooking in one month than some of us do the rest of the year!

We can focus more on our faith than the holiday hustle and bustle by marking the days with popular activities.



Traditional Advent activities:

Advent Wreath

Advent Calendar

Jesse Tree



Advent Wreath

The most recognized Advent tradition is the **Advent wreath**.

It consists of a wreath of evergreens and four candles. Traditionally there are 3 violet candles and 1 rose candle, although sometimes 4 blue candles are used. These are the same colors as the priest's vestments during the Advent Masses.

How does it work?

Begin lighting candles each Sunday of Advent.

Week 1 - Light the first violet candle.

Week 2 - Light the first and second violet candles.

Week 3 - Light the rose candle in addition to the 2 violet candles. Rose symbolizes joy – the darkness is ending and we now have more light than darkness.

Week 4 - The Light of the world is coming soon! Light all the candles the fourth week. The excitement keeps growing!



See resource page for an Advent wreath blessing

Did You Know?

The third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday, which means Rejoicing Sunday

Advent Wreath

Symbolism of the Advent Wreath

Wreaths or wheels with lighted candles have been a custom since pre-Christian days. Christians adopted the custom and formalized it with Christian symbolism by the Middle Ages.

Circular wreath – God has no beginning and no end

Evergreens – Eternal life

Pine cones, nuts, or seed pods – Resurrection or rebirth

Four candles – four weeks of Advent

Purple – prayer, penance, preparation

Rose – Joy

Flame from lit candle – Christ, the Light of the world



Advent Calendar

Advent calendars became popular in Germany in the 19th century.

Nowadays they usually help count down the days of Advent beginning on December 1st, and continuing until Christmas Day.

These calendars are available as religious symbols and non-religious symbols. They range from Christmas scenes with Bible verses each day to a new toy everyday of Advent. Choose the calendar which helps your family best celebrate the spirit of Advent.



Religious Advent Calendar



Jesse Tree

“... a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse...” (Is 1:1)

The Jesse Tree relates the genealogy of Jesus through daily reading of Old Testament passages.

Jesse was the father of David, the great king of Israel. We know the stories of David defeating Goliath. It is just as important to remember that the Messiah, the Savior of the world, came from the family of David.

Using selected texts from the Old Testament, we can more fully understand the birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises to the chosen people.





HOPE

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Hope

Christmas is coming!

We hope we will have the shopping, cooking, and preparations completed in time!

More importantly, we hope for the Second Coming of the Messiah. We hope for the salvation of our bodies and souls, the inseparable parts of each of us.

During Advent, we can also hope for our bodies and souls to be united in this world, too. That means we need to get beyond the materialism and get together with our souls!

During this hopeful time we look to the angels, saints, and the Blessed Virgin Mary as examples of faith and hope. Our liturgical calendar guides us toward special heroes during this season of preparation.



Sanctoral Cycle

St. Nicholas (December 6) - There are children in many parts of the world who hang their stockings over the hearth on the evening of December 5th, then wake up and look for special treats on December 6th.

The original St. Nicholas was a bishop in Asia Minor. He was well-known for opposing heresies, as well as for his charity. The best known story about St. Nicholas involves his secretly giving money to a poor man's daughters so they could marry.

To this day we celebrate the charity of St. Nicholas by exchanging gifts at Christmas.



St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra

Sanctoral Cycle

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8)

The celebration of Mary's conception free from original sin. (*This is **not** a remembrance of the conception of Jesus, a common mistake.*) Although this was accepted by Sacred Tradition for centuries, it was not actually defined as dogma until 1854.

Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12)

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of the Americas. Our Lady appeared to St. Juan Diego, a Native American in the early 1500s, and asked him to build a chapel at that spot. She gave him roses to take to his bishop. When he opened his cloak to give the bishop the roses, the flowers were gone and an image of Our Lady was on the cloak instead. Many parishes in North and South America are celebrating this feast!



Sanctoral Cycle

St. Lucy – December 13

Very little is known about St. Lucy except that she was a young martyr who was tortured and killed for her faith.

A common celebration for this feast day is having the eldest daughter cook breakfast for the family.

We're not sure where this tradition came from, but we practice it joyfully!

St. Lucy is the patron of the blind and those with eye troubles.



The Creche – the Nativity Scene

The creche is a favorite scene during Advent and the Christmas season

History - Nativity scenes had been popular in churches to celebrate the birth of our Lord, but it was St. Francis of Assisi in the 12th century who made nativity scenes popular for everyday people.

Tradition - Bring out the Nativity sets, as many as you've got! Take a few moments to say a family blessing. Then set up the creche in a special place

Wait until Christmas eve to put the Baby Jesus in the manger.

Try to wait until Epiphany (January 6) to let the Wise Men join in the fun!



Nativity scene by Giotto



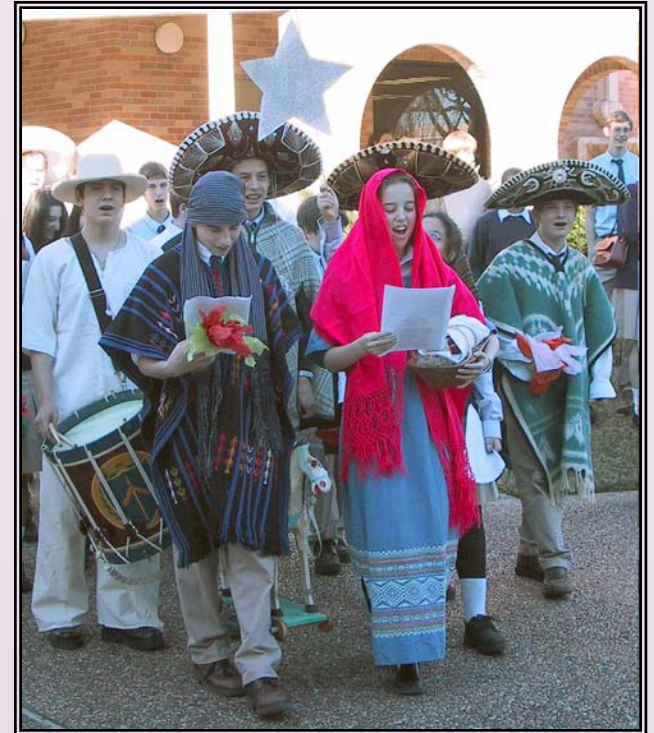
Advent Processions

Perhaps one of the most joyful and hope-filled celebrations comes from Mexico Las Posadas (Spanish for "the inn")

Beginning December 16th and lasting nine consecutive nights, this traditional Mexican festival re-enacts Joseph's search for a room at the inn. Lucky children lead the procession through the streets portraying the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, angels, and shepherds.

While praying with scripture and singing Christmas carols called *villancicos*, the procession stops at three previously selected homes and asks for lodging for the night. There is no room in the inn, but there is in the stable.

Nightly celebrations, refreshments, and filled piñatas are the high point of each night.





Conversion



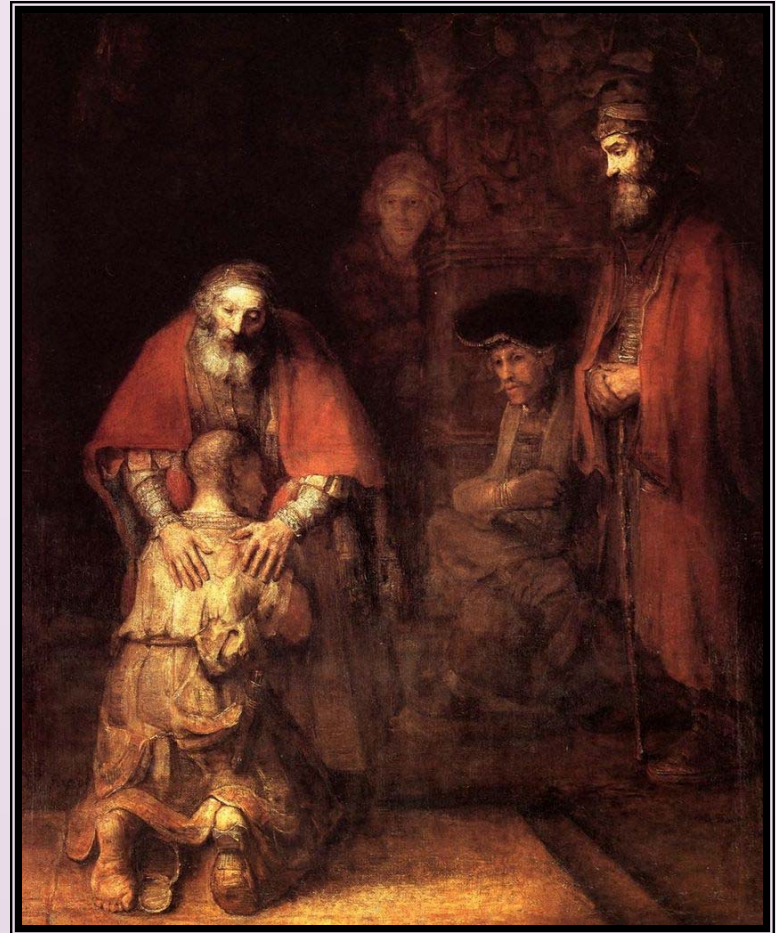
Sacrament of Reconciliation

The season of Advent encourages us to reflect on our lives in peace and solitude.

We consider how well we put hope into action by ridding our world of suffering and distress.

The reflection normally reveals both strengths and weaknesses. We pray to enhance our strengths.

We receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation to repent, confess, make reparation, and, with God's grace, overcome our weaknesses.

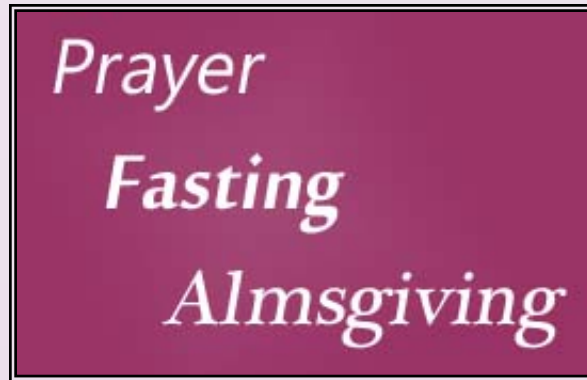


Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal Son



Conversion

When we experience an interior conversion to God, we cannot help but show it!



Traditional ways to show our conversion of heart are:

- **Prayer** – turning to God
- **Fasting** – turning away from oneself
- **Almsgiving** – Giving oneself to others

Prayer

Prayer is simply our response to God's call. There are so many ways to pray, but people often feel uncomfortable with them. Give it a try. You may be surprised how easy it can be, and how welcoming God is.

A few Advent prayer suggestions:

- Read the Sunday scriptures *before* Mass
- Read the daily Advent scriptures
 - Pray the “O” Antiphons



[Click here for a list of Advent scriptures](#)

[Click here for information on “O Antiphons”](#)



Fasting

Most of us do not associate Advent with fasting. However, consuming less or nothing is an excellent way to achieve a higher good. Usually we think of fasting from food, but there other effective ways to fast as well.

Food	Give up favorite food Eat healthier food Eat one or more meals together as a family
Inactivity	Begin an exercise program Volunteer to help at Church or with another community service
Distractions	Reduce or eliminate TV Limit time at computer, ipod, or on the phone
Entertainment	Trade movies or other activities which cost money for staying home and playing family games. (Use the money you save for almsgiving)
Other	Avoid caffeine Avoid alcohol Avoid disrespectful behavior

Almsgiving

Advent is a time of giving. Usually we only think of financial donations as almsgiving. Also consider contributing your time and talent; the gift of oneself is just as important.

Time

Visit the sick or imprisoned
Send a letter to a friend or loved one
Call your godparent or godchild
Participate in a parish social event
Participate in parish ministries

Talent

Consider how you can use your talents as a gift
Use your talents to make a difference in the world around you. That world may be within your own family, your local community, or even world-wide.

Treasure

Look around your house at all the worldly goods with which you have been blessed. Are there any you can do without? The St. Vincent de Paul Society, or other charitable organization, would be happy to receive them.

*The bread which you do not use is the bread of the hungry; The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of him who is naked; The shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot; The money that you keep locked away is the money of the poor; The acts of charity that you do not perform are so many injustices that you commit. **St. Basil the Great***

Keeping it in the Home

Give Advent a chance!

- Focus on Advent traditions and enjoy the Advent saints
- Light your Advent candles at meal times, open your Advent calendar every day, and keep the gift-giving low key.
- Delay the Christmas decorations
- Give yourself the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Practice some charity and repentance.
- Remember the first coming of our Lord, as a humble human being. Prepare for the second coming of our Savior, in glory.



Murillo's *Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception*



Resources

Advent wreaths and other signs of faith are called sacramentals. You can read about sacramentals in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1667-1673

The Blessing of the Advent Wreath – [Click here to access the blessing](#) from the web site of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops

The Blessing of the Crèche - [Click here to access the blessing](#) from the web site of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops

Penance requires the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction. Read about what is necessary for penance and reconciliation in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1450-1460



Quick Review

Advent

Advent is a season of waiting, conversion, and hope. Our primary job is to respond to God's call. Remember, He is patiently waiting for us to welcome Him into our lives.

By making an effort to overcome sin in our own lives, we prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of Him "who saves his people from their sins."

Have yourself a merry little Advent!

