

Advent: A Time of Waiting, Conversion & Hope

Each Advent season, in prayer and humility we pray and prepare for Christmas. We call to mind the love of the Father reflected in the presence of his Son among us who came to teach us, forgive us, and make us holy through his gift of new life in the Holy Spirit. We and the world can never be the same.

Symbols and traditions enhance our observance of Advent, which the *Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy* describes as a time of waiting, conversion, and hope.

The Advent wreath is an ancient Christian tradition. Just as we long for the brightness of the summer sun during the winter's cold, so does the gradually brightening light of this wreath herald the dawn of Christ, the Light of the World! Traditionally, Advent wreaths are a circle of evergreen branches into which four candles are inserted, representing the four weeks of Advent. Ideally, three candles are purple and one is rose, but white candles can also be used. Many parishes and other organizations sell Advent wreaths, but it is also easy to create one. The progressive lighting of the candles on the Sundays of Advent symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world.

A "Jesse Tree" is another Advent tradition that is especially appropriate for families with young children. A Jesse Tree depicts the relationship of Jesus with Jesse and other biblical figures who were the ancestors of Jesus. Jesse was the father of King David and is often looked upon as the first person in the genealogy of Jesus. For your own Jesse Tree, a branch can be placed into a pot or a large vase at the beginning of Advent and every day a new ornament can be added to it. These ornaments represent individual

figures or stories from the Old and New Testaments. As the children place the ornaments onto the branch, a parent can read an appropriate scripture passage that talks about the given ancestor of Jesus. You can find ready-made Jesse Tree ornaments online or create your own.

As believers in Christ, we find his presence most perfectly in the Eucharist, as well as in prayer, in his Church, and in our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need of our love. We are encouraged to pray often during this Advent season and to attend daily Mass as our schedules allow. It is also a time to be generous with our patience, our giving of ourselves, and our concern for those in need.

Each day at Mass, we describe our life as waiting in joyful hope. Christ is our hope, and the season of Advent gives us the opportunity to join together as we recall and await the three comings of Christ: His coming two-thousand years ago as man, his coming into the hearts of every believer, and his coming at the end of time.

