

Traditions of Advent

Following ancient custom and Catholic precedent, the Episcopal Church keeps Advent as a season of preparation for Our Lord's coming. Unlike the culture, we do not celebrate Christmas until we have prepared ourselves to receive the gift of Christ. Therefore, it is traditional that we do not decorate our church, nor our homes, until Christmas Eve. We do not sing Christmas carols until Christmas Eve. But having begun to sing them at Midnight Mass, we sing them for the Twelve Days of Christmas (Christmas is a season, not just a day!) While the culture "throws out" the dead tree on December 26, we say, "Let the party continue! Joy to the World!"

The Advent wreath is a wonderful means by which we focus our thoughts and prayers on keeping the integrity of the Advent Season. It reminds us of the prophet Isaiah who said, *"The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light."* Sunday after Sunday, a new candle dispels the darkness, until at Christmas, our eyes begin to adjust from the darkness of sin as we prepare to see the brightness of Christ, the light of the world.

The following are some suggestions for family prayers.



First Sunday

We remember that Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead...

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us humbly, that in the last day, when He comes again in His glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through Him who the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God now and forever. Amen.



Second Sunday

We hear St. John the Baptist remind us to repent of our sins...

Merciful God, who sent thy messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God now and forever. Amen.

Third Sunday

Called "Gaudete" or "rose rejoicing Sunday." We light the rose colored candle. Our anticipation grows! Like the Shepherds, we are "almost at Bethlehem." We stand on the hills and hasten our pace. "Let us go and see this which the Lord has made known to us."



Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us, and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.



Fourth Sunday

Hail, Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee...

Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us, and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.



The Christmas Creche

Remember, if you put out your Creche (manger scene) before Christmas, do not put the baby Jesus in the manger until Christmas Eve, This is often a task that the youngest child will enjoy.

Also, remember the "Wise Men" do not come until Epiphany (January 6). There is an old tradition of allowing the Wise Men to "creep." That is, move them from place to place in the room as if they are journeying to Bethlehem, moving them closer and closer to the manger until they arrive on January 6. Again this is something the children will enjoy.

Blessed Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany to you all!

Fr. Dow+

