

Welcome to Advent: Journeying to Bethlehem

Advent is a time of preparation and hope where we look forward to the birth of Christ and the second coming of Christ.

History of Advent

When Christians began observing Advent is a mystery. The earliest mention of Advent in the Western church is in the 5th century when St. Gregory of Tours mentions that St. Perpetuus had decreed a fast of three times per week from the feast of St. Martin on November 11 until Christmas. Whether this was a new requirement or Perpetuus was reiterating an existing one, is unknown. This practice expanded to all Christians in the Western church. Called St. Martin's Lent, it echoed the 40 days of Lent before Easter.

A few centuries later the period of Advent was shortened to the four weeks which is how we current observe it and the obligation to fast was no longer enforced as rigorously but in some countries such as France fasting continued to be observed.

In the Eastern Orthodox church Advent is called the Fast of the Nativity and is a period of fasting and reflective preparation.

Colors of Advent

Since the 13th century, the liturgical color for Advent in the Western church was purple; although in the early 1200s Pope Innocent III declared black to be the proper color for Advent, which was largely ignored.

In some denominations, blue, often referred to as Sarum blue, is used. Blue represents hope. Its use as a liturgical color for Advent comes from the Lutheran Church of Sweden and the medieval Sarum Rite in England.) is the [Latin liturgical rite](#) developed at [Salisbury Cathedral](#) and used from the late [eleventh century](#) until the [English Reformation](#)

On the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday (*gaudete* means rejoice in Latin), rose may be used instead, referencing the rose used on Laetare Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Lent.

Eastern Orthodoxy uses red although gold is an alternative color for the Nativity Fast.

The four Sundays of Advent

Each Sunday in Advent has a meaning or theme, although there are a variety of options or ideas on what those may be, and it can vary from denomination to denomination.

Faith or hope may be the focus of the first week. Peace, faith, preparation, or hope are sometimes used on the second Sunday. Joy is consistently used for the third Sunday of Advent. And love is predominant on the last Sunday. Another theme is The Prophets' Candle, symbolizing hope; the Bethlehem Candle, symbolizing faith; the Shepherds' Candle, symbolizing joy; the Angel's Candle, symbolizing love.

Advent Wreaths

In 1839, a Lutheran minister working at a children's mission in Germany created a wreath out of the wheel of a cart with 20 small red candles on the wheel's outer ring and four larger white candles inside the ring, lighting the red candles on weekdays and the four white candles on Sundays as a way for the children to count down the days until Christmas.

Holly leaves, berries, and seeds can be added to the Advent wreath. Holly leaves can be prickly and therefore used to represent the crown of thorns placed on Jesus's head during his crucifixion. Berries, which are typically red, also point to Christ's sacrifice and the bloodshed for sins. Pinecones, seeds, and nuts are also placed within the wreath as a symbol and promise of new life. The circular nature of the Advent wreath, similar to a wedding ring or band, is further meant to reflect the unending love of Christ and eternal life offered through salvation. A rose-colored candle is often used in the Advent wreath for the third Sunday in Advent as a sign of joy.

Advent calendars

Advent calendars began in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century when families would count the days until Christmas by making chalk marks on a door or wall sometimes lighting a candle or hanging a religious picture each day leading to Christmas Eve.

Families began to make homemade Advent calendars to accompany their countdown and printed calendars began to be produced by the early 1900s.

The real popularity of Advent calendars us due to Gerhard Lang, a German printer. Lang began designing cardboard Advent calendars around the turn of the century and, later in the 1920s, had the idea of cutting out little doors that could be opened each day showing a devotional picture or Bible verse.

Some Advent practices

- Advent at Christ Church <https://www.christchurchcolumbia.org/advent-and-christmas>
- Compline Thursdays at 7 Pm in Old Brick
- Taizé Fridays at 6 PM in Old Brick
- Advent Quiet Day, December 3, 8:30-12:00
- Read the daily office at Forward Day by Day <https://prayer.forwardmovement.org/pray>
- Advent Word <https://adventword.org/>
- The Way of Love <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/>