

Welcome!

Coming so quickly on the heels of Thanksgiving, Advent can be a shock to our senses. Beginning four Sundays before December 25, which sometimes means just three days after Thanksgiving, Advent calls us to live December differently than much of the world would have us do. Our churches look different, and the music, prayers, and scripture readings herald the start of something new. Our parish homes are awash in the purple and rose hues and sacred hymns of the season. At home, we gather our wreaths and search for our candles and try to shift to a pace that enables us to gather quietly together, in physical presence or perhaps remotely, for just a few minutes each day. While commerce tells us how many shopping days we have before Christmas, we who desire to fully live Advent mark these days in a different way. We count down not to the opening of presents but rather to the fulfillment of God's promises—yes, for each of us, but also for all humanity and, indeed, for all creation.

The Church instructs us on the nature and purpose of this holy season. Advent has a twofold character: preparation for the great Feast of Christmas, when we celebrate the coming of the Christ child at Bethlehem, and spiritual renewal as we anticipate Christ coming again in the fullness of time. In fact, the name *Advent* was derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming” or “arrival.” *Adventus* was a translation of the Greek word *parousia*, a term used in the New Testament

pointing to the Second Coming of Christ. My hope and prayer is that this little booklet helps you and those with whom you share life and home to ready your hearts and minds for Christ being born anew.

For the past few years, we have collectively been plunged into a time of darkness, fear, and intense uncertainty. We continue to work our way through pandemic living and worldwide instability. Yet these months of loss and isolation have offered many of us time and mental space for introspection and stirred hopes for a brighter world. In some ways, the reset from our former ways of celebrating has reminded us to ponder what matters most in our lives, to lean into a trusting faith in God's presence, and to do what we can to love and connect with others. Being unable to be physically proximate to family and friends has deepened the love we feel for them and our longing for time together. Saying goodbye to loved ones who have passed away has rekindled our hope in the Communion of Saints. Forcing ourselves to stay home has reminded many of us of the beautiful potential of our own domestic churches as places of worship and prayer.

I love that Advent marks the beginning of our liturgical year. As an optimist and a planner, I always anticipate this season in the same way I look forward to setting annual resolutions each New Year's Day. As much as I love God and my Catholic faith, I am still always cognizant of my need to slow down, to rest in God's embrace, and to share the love I receive from God with others in my life. Advent invites me to reimagine all that remains to learn about what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ.

But Advent can rush past me before I know it! My days quickly fill up with many tasks and social gatherings, making it all too easy for me to miss what is most sacred about this time of year. Every moment seems occupied with readying my home and preparing my family's wonderful traditions. Frequently, in my haste to do it all and make lasting memories, I neglect to properly prepare my heart to celebrate the child Jesus, to make room for Christ in my life each day, and to set my soul on his coming in glory at the end of time.

The Advent Wreath

The custom of lighting and praying around Advent wreaths likely started with German Lutherans in the sixteenth century, but the precise history remains unclear. It's easy enough to create your own, and there are plentiful instructions available online showing you how to do so. The traditional materials are quite basic: four candles and evergreen branches set in a circle appropriately sized for a special prayer space in your home. Traditions vary on the colors of the four candles. Some places use four white candles, and others use red, but most common in the United States is one rose and three purple candles. Inexpensive taper candles work well, as do pillar candles or votive lights. Some people add ribbons or dried foliage for a bit more color. Use your creative skills to keep your wreath as simple or as fancy as you want.

The wreath's circle of evergreens represents the never-ending promise of eternal life. The purple candles (or perhaps white candles with purple ribbons) mark the solemn tone of the season and call us to wait patiently, eyes set on Christ. The

rose candle (or white with rose ribbon) reminds us to rejoice as we draw near to Christmas. A single purple candle is lit each day of the first week of Advent and then two purple candles during the second week. The lighting of the rose candle is added for the third week, and all four candles are lit during the fourth week. The light of our Advent wreaths grows in the deepening darkness of late fall and early winter in the Northern Hemisphere, representing for us the Light of Christ that shines in the darkness of our broken and longing world. From the sacred spaces of our homes, Catholics and many other Christians await the celebration of our Messiah's birth.

Praying with This Booklet

There is no right way to use this booklet. If you live alone, perhaps you can gather with friends or family remotely, each lighting their own wreath or candles as you join for common prayer. Or perhaps your prayer and reflection might include journaling. If you live with other adults, adjust your reflection and conversation as best suits the needs of your household. If you are blessed with children in your home, involve them in whatever ways work for you. Young children will enjoy watching the lighting of candles, sitting in silence, listening to the scriptures, and perhaps even leading the prayer. Older children may most enjoy the few moments of stillness in their busy lives. Everyone ought to consider singing since, as St. Augustine is thought to have said, "The one who sings prays twice." The words for "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" are available for free download at <https://www.avemariapress.com/products/5-minute-prayers-around-the-advent-wreath>. There,

you will also find short prayers to some of the saints whose feasts we celebrate during Advent.

When children are present, you may want to skip the written reflection that follows the short Bible reading each day and instead let the simple ritual actions of gathering, lighting candles, praying, singing, and listening to the Bible reading be your focus. Ask the children what they think about Advent, the short rituals, and the Bible reading or what they want to say to Jesus. Share your own thoughts. Faith sharing is not about right and wrong answers; it is about telling one another what we believe, wonder, or love about God. Sometimes it's mostly about the questions children have. If you don't have ready answers, talk about how you might find them, and then do so later on.

From December 17 through December 23, we pray the O Antiphons, which are drawn from Evening Prayer (from the Church's Liturgy of the Hours) for these days. Each antiphon celebrates a title of Christ and appears in this booklet at the beginning of the devotions for the appropriate day.

I pray that this little booklet can be for your family or your household a doorway into the profound solace of a well-kept Advent. With a few minutes of daily silence, scripture, prayer, private reflection or shared conversation, and maybe just a bit of singing, I hope you find and grow to cherish a place of quiet refuge around your Advent wreath. Put away any stressful expectations of what you think Advent should be, and allow this to be a time of simplicity, focus, and sacred longing for what matters most. May this season of great hope draw your hearts and minds closer to Christ and to others in the radiant light of God's amazing love!

First Sunday of Advent

Light the first purple candle and pray:

**Behold, the Lord will come,
and all his holy ones with him;
and on that day there will be a great light!**

Pray in silence or sing a verse of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”

Read:

Jesus said to his disciples:

So will it be [also] at the coming of the Son of Man.

Two men will be out in the field;

one will be taken, and one will be left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill;

one will be taken, and one will be left.

Therefore, stay awake!

For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

—*Matthew 24:39b–42*

Today marks a new beginning and an urgent call to a powerful mission. The signs of this holy season invite us to live vigilantly, set apart from what we may be experiencing in the world around us. We light the first of four candles, offering a tiny flicker of light that will burn ever more brightly throughout Advent. Songs of anticipation evoke the hope we feel. The color purple reminds us to live with penitent hearts, readying ourselves for a moment that will come unexpectedly. Christ's Second Coming will happen according to God's design, not

by our plans. Jesus reminds us to be ready for him. With no certain itinerary but a clear destination, we move ahead with expectant hope, confident that God is with us every step of the way. Come, Lord Jesus!

In silence, journaling, or conversation, ask:
Where have I met Christ today?

Where will I watch for Christ tomorrow?

Pray:
Loving God, thank you for the gifts, blessings, and joys of this day. Accompany and strengthen us so that we may actively live your love among our neighbors. Amen.

While making the Sign of the Cross, pray together:
Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!

First Monday of Advent

Light the first purple candle and pray:

**Behold, the Lord will come,
and all his holy ones with him;
and on that day there will be a great light!**

Pray in silence or sing a verse of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”

Read:

“Come, let us climb the LORD’s mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
That he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths.”
For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and set terms for many peoples.
They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
One nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.
House of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the LORD!

—*Isaiah 2:3–5*

This Advent, here in the shelter of our home, we begin a journey. God asks us to walk toward the peace and love of the Christmas promise. Our world is too often torn apart

by sorrow, intolerance, violence, and deep injustices. But we need not fear, even in the darkness, because we are not climbing God's mountain alone. By reading God's Word, praying together, and lovingly supporting one another, we find the right path. Walking in the light means not only learning to better love God and our families but also carrying that love out into the world around us. Let's think about this together.

In silence, journaling, or conversation, ask:

Where have I met Christ today?

Where will I watch for Christ tomorrow?

Pray:

Loving God, thank you for the gifts, blessings, and joys of this day. Accompany and strengthen us so that we may actively live your love among our neighbors. Amen.

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