

# THE ADVENT SEASON

As Lent is a time of preparation for Easter, so Advent is a time of preparation for the Christmas Season. Advent practices were developed to parallel Lenten ones.

Advent begins four Sundays before Dec. 25:

- as early as Nov. 27, when Dec. 25 is a Sunday
- as late as Dec. 3, when Dec. 25 is a Monday
- Advent's "4th week" can last from one day (Dec. 24) to seven.

## Historical Development

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, the Church in Gaul (today, France) observed a 3-week Advent. Over the next two centuries, Advent was lengthened to 6 weeks, imitating Lent. It was a preparation for baptisms at Epiphany, as Lent prepared for baptisms at the Easter Vigil. Subsequently, Rome cut Advent back to 4 weeks, ending at Christmas.

## Themes

Our present observance combines elements of the Gallican and Roman traditions:

- The first two weeks focus on awaiting the Second Coming of Christ (the Future Coming), from the Gallican tradition.
  - The First Sunday uses "End of Time" or "Day of Judgment" readings.
  - The Second Sunday Gospels feature John the Baptist.
- The last two weeks focus on awaiting the birth of Christ (the Historical Coming), from the Roman tradition.
  - Third Sunday is marked by joyful anticipation, with the Gospel featuring John the Baptist as the messenger pointing to the imminent coming of Christ
  - The Fourth Sunday readings remind us of God's promise of a ruler for Israel; the Gospels present the Annunciation (Years A/B) or the Visitation (Year C).

## Liturgical Practices

- Advent Wreath – a symbol of victory and hope:
  - Victor's crown (Christ victorious over sin/ Light over Darkness)
  - Green branches (evergreens are a sign of life in winter)
  - Candles – 3 purple, 1 pink: light overcomes darkness as the days shorten
- Vestment colors:
  - Purple – parallels Lenten theme of penance
  - Pink – halfway point (3rd Sunday) – Gaudete Sunday
  - Dark Blue: color of the sky before dawn – ANTICIPATION themes
- "O" Antiphons –
  - used in evening prayer from Dec. 17-23
  - address Christ under various titles
  - look forward to his imminent coming
- "Gloria" – not used on the Sundays of Advent

## “O ANTIPHONS”

O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love:

**come to teach us the path of knowledge!**

O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:

**come to rescue us with your mighty power!**

O Root of Jesse’s stem, sign of God’s love for all his people:

**come to save us without delay!**

O Key of David, opening the gates of God’s eternal Kingdom:

**come and free the prisoners of darkness!**

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:

**come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death!**

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church:

**come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!**

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:

**come to save us, Lord our God!**

