

The

Advent Wreath



at home

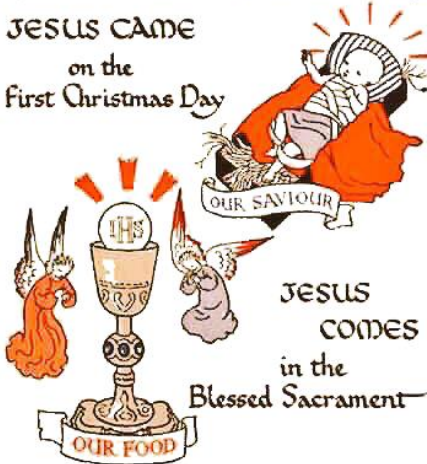
Saint Paul's Church
Kinderhook, New York

What is Advent?

The Latin word *adventus* denotes the action of arriving. During this time of year, Christians who, like us, follow a calendar of observances, meditate and study the parts of the Bible that speak of Jesus Christ arriving to fulfill ancient prophecies. Christians who trace their religious traditions to the former eastern part of the Roman Empire observe "Saint Martin's fast" for six weeks from the mid-November feast of Saint Martin of Tours. Maronites (Arab Christians whose practices come from Lebanon) call it the "Season of Happy Announcements" and reflect each week on one of the six Biblical announcements of the birth of Jesus.

But Advent is not just a countdown to Christmas. Just as the promise of his first coming was fulfilled, so Jesus promises to return to earth again in bodily form (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27) to establish his endless Kingdom, in which evil and death will cease (chapter 21 of the book of the Revelation to John). As he will "judge the living and the dead," we begin this season with repentance for sin and a firm resolve to amend our lives, so that we will be ready for his second arrival.

ADVENT
 THE BEGINNING
 of the CHURCH'S YEAR
ADVENT means **COMING**
 We think of Jesus coming in 3 different ways
JESUS CAME
 on the
 First Christmas Day



I II III IV
SUNDAYS

JESUS
 WILL COME
 at the Last Day



The Wreath

The Advent Wreath is an excellent way for children and families to make faith a natural part of the landscape of their life, faith, and identity.

The use of the Advent Wreath began in Germany in the middle of the 19th century. Like the much older practice of setting up Nativity scenes in the home (popularized by Saint Francis of Assisi in the middle ages), it serves as a cultural reminder of the saving work of Jesus Christ in fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

The Jewish festival of Hanukkah, which commemorates the re-dedication of the Temple after the Maccabean revolt, was, until the twentieth century, a relatively minor occasion in the Jewish calendar. While there is no direct connection between Hanukkah and the Advent Wreath, the themes of God's steadfast love and care and enduring light are deeply Biblical and resonates with Christians, Jews, and other faiths as well. Read the prophecies of Isaiah, the first chapter of John's Gospel, and the First Book of the Maccabees in particular.

The custom of naming each week and its candle with an attribute (peace, hope, joy, and love), though quite popular, is a very recent innovation. While no one can object to such good and valuable aspirations, we follow the traditional symbolism here.

Using the Wreath

The Advent Wreath prayer service given here is self-explanatory. It may be used once a week, or every night during the week, or whenever the family gathers. The evening meal may be a convenient time, but any other time is good.

We commend the use of the Daily Office (Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer; Evening Prayer, and Compline (nighttime prayer before retiring) from the *Book of Common Prayer* or another source. Many who do this follow the ancient custom of using an antiphon with the Song of Mary (*Magnificat*, Luke 1:46-55) in Evening Prayer beginning about nine days before Christmas.

These "Great O Antiphons" have come down to us as the verses of the hymn, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. The text are provided in this booklet. You may sing or recite a verse each evening before Christmas beginning on December 16 and ending on December 23. You may sing the verse for the day, or add a verse each day until, by the end, you sing the entire hymn.

First Week of Advent

All gather around the Advent wreath around the time of the evening meal.



Leader Watch, for you do not know when the master of the house will come — in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning — lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. (*Mark 13:35,36*)

The first candle (blue or purple) is lit.

Someone reads the Scripture lesson below.

Friends, I don't need to explain when this is going to happen. You know as well as I do that the Master will return when his Father sends him, not when it suits our calendars. He won't call ahead and make an appointment any more than a burglar would. Others think they don't have to worry about when — or if — he will come back, or how he will react when he finds them thinking, complacently, "Life is good; we won't be disturbed; we can take it easy!" When they least expect it, the day will come upon them like labor pains. But friends, you are not in the dark. You won't be caught off guard: You are sons of Light, daughters of Day. So let's not sleepwalk through life. Let's keep our eyes open. Others love the darkness of night so they can let their guard down or shirk their duty or help themselves to the Master's supplies, but not us. We treat every minute as if it were full day. Stay alert and dressed in faith, love, and hope for salvation. God didn't set us up for an angry rejection, but for salvation by our Master, Jesus Christ. He died for us, and his death triggered life. Whether we are awake with the living or asleep with the dead, we're *alive* with him! Keep reminding each other of this; keep encouraging each other to stay at our post. Build up hope. Stay together in this: leave nobody out, leave no one behind. You are already doing this; keep it up.

(*I Thessalonians 5:1-11*; paraphrase based on *The Message*.)

All pray the Lord's prayer together, followed by this prayer:

ALL **God our Father, we ask for the light of your peace and love to shine in our hearts and in our world. Help us to prepare ourselves and our homes to receive the Light of the world, our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.**

If a meal follows, grace is said at this time.

Second Week of Advent

All gather around the Advent wreath around the time of the evening meal.



Leader In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)

The first and second candles (blue or purple) are lit.

Someone reads the Scripture lesson below.

When Mary's elderly cousin, Elizabeth, was at the end of her pregnancy, she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives, seeing that God had overwhelmed her with mercy, celebrated with her. On the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child and were calling him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth intervened: "No. He is to be called John." "But," they said, "we always name people after someone else in the mother's family. Nobody in your family is named that." Zechariah was deaf and mute because he had doubted the angel who said that he and Elizabeth would have a child in their own age. So they used sign language to ask him what he wanted the baby named. Zechariah asked for a tablet, and wrote, "His name is to be John." That took everyone by surprise, and they were even more surprised when Zechariah's mouth opened, and his tongue was set loose, and he was talking, praising God! A deep, reverent fear settled over the neighborhood, and in all that Judean hill country people started talking about nothing else. Everyone who heard about it took it to heart, wondering, "What will become of this child? Clearly, God has a hand in this." Then Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to his people, and has set them free!"

(Luke 1:57-68; paraphrase based on *The Message*.)

All pray the Lord's prayer together, followed by this prayer:

ALL Heavenly Father, help us to remember that you are always with us. Cleanse our hearts of all thoughts and desires that keep us from loving you and our neighbor and fill us with your love that we may be prepared to receive your Son when he comes, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

If a meal follows, grace is said at this time.

Third Week of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)

All gather around the Advent wreath around the time of the evening meal.



Leader Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice. (*Philippians 4:4*)

*The first three candles (two blue or purple,
and the rose or red candle) are lit.*

Someone reads the Scripture lesson below.

Friends, listen to these next words carefully:

Slow down. Don't go jumping to conclusions about the day when our Master, Jesus Christ, will come back and we assemble to welcome him. Don't let anyone scare you or get you excited over some breathless report. Don't fall for any letter, supposedly from me, Paul, saying that the day of his arrival has come and gone.

We always thank God for you, good friends — so loved by God! You are the first fruits of humanity. Like the first fruits of the harvest offering, God has set you aside, not for ordinary consumption, but for ceremonial use: to be a visible symbol, a sign of his great mercy and love; to impress all creation with what God does. Your job is not just to *be* saved, passively, but to announce far and wide that salvation is available to everyone. Do this both by the witness and example of your life, *and* by recounting what he has done in you. Your faith in the truth of God's word — not just a printed word but now also a living person, Jesus Christ — is God's down payment to humanity on his promises. You get in on Jesus Christ's glory by letting the Holy Spirit shape you like him, and then telling others about him.

So, friends, take a firm stand. Keep a tight grip on what we handed on to you, and remember how we handed it on, so you, in turn, can hand it on to others without distortion. Jesus Christ himself and God our Father reached out in love to humanity, grasped you as its handle, and surprised you with gifts of unending help and confidence. May God put a fresh heart in you, invigorate what you do to accomplish his work, and enliven your telling of his story.

(II Thessalonians 2:1-3, 13-17; paraphrase based on *The Message*.)

Starting on December 16, and each night thereafter, recite or sing a verse of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (No 56 in the Hymnal, 1982); words are in the back of this book.

All then pray the Lord's prayer together. Conclude with this prayer:

ALL Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

If a meal follows, grace is said at this time.

Fourth Sunday of Advent



If the fourth Sunday of Advent falls on December 24, the Advent wreath lighting for the Fourth Sunday is performed on the vigil (Saturday, December 23).

All gather around the Advent wreath around the time of the evening meal.

Leader The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.
(Isaiah 40:5)

All four candles are lit.

Someone reads the Scripture lesson below.

During the time that Ahaz was king of Judah, King Rezin and King Pekah attacked Jerusalem. When the government learned that Aram had joined forces with Israel to attack Judah, Ahaz and his people shook like trees in the wind. Then GOD told Isaiah, "Go meet Ahaz. Tell him, 'Listen, calm down. Don't be afraid. And don't panic over Rezin and Pekah. GOD, the Master, says that nothing will come of it. But if you don't take your stand in faith, you won't have a leg to stand on.'"

GOD spoke again to Ahaz. This time he said, "Ahaz, ask for a sign from GOD. Ask anything. Be extravagant." But Ahaz said, "I'd never do that. I'd never make demands like that on GOD!" So Isaiah told him, "Then listen to this! It's bad enough you weary people with your hypocrisy, but now you're making God tired. So the Master is going to give you a sign anyway: A girl who is a virgin will become pregnant. She will bear a son, and name him Immanuel (God-with-us).

By the time he is twelve, able to make moral decisions, the threat of war will be over. So relax. But also, be warned: GOD will bring on you and your people and government a judgement."

(excerpts from *Isaiah 7:1-17*; paraphrase based on *The Message*.)

Continue singing or reciting verses of the hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (No 56 in the Hymnal, 1982), ending with "O come, O come, Emmanuel."

Then all pray the Lord's prayer together. Conclude with this prayer:

ALL Holy Father, as we wait for the coming of your Son, help us to recognize him in those we know, and also in the stranger. Help us to love, not only our families and our friends, but also our enemies. Help us to be patient and to be prepared to receive your Son in our hearts, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

If a meal follows, grace is said at this time.

The Great O Antiphons

December 16

O Sapientia [O Wisdom]

O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
Who orderest all things mightily:
To us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 17

O Adonai [O Lord]

O come, O come, thou Lord of might,
Who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times didst give the Law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 18

O Radix Jesse [O Root of Jesse]

O come, thou Rod of Jesse's stem,
from every foe deliver them
that trust thy mighty power to save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 19

O Clavis David [O Key of David]

O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 20

O Oriens [O Sunrise]

O come, thou Day-spring from on high
and cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 21

O Rex gentium [O King of the Nations]

O come, Desire of Nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
and be thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 22

O Virgo virginum [O Virgin of virgins]

O glorious virgin, 'Salem quakes:
What news is this that Gabriel breaks?
Behold the sacred mystery,
for God himself takes flesh in thee.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

December 23

O Emmanuel [O God-with-us]

O come, o come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.