

Advent / Christmas ...

The seasons of **Advent / Christmas** and **Lent / Easter** are each two halves that make a whole. In other words, Christmas is already contained within Advent. An element of the **fulfilment** is somehow already present in the **promise**. In the same way, Lent (the **dying**) always contains the seed of Easter (the **rising**). Our Christian faith is built on this positive movement:

- ❖ through hope to the fulfilment of the promise
- ❖ through darkness to light
- ❖ through death to life

We can't really feel the depth of completion by celebrating one of these seasons in isolation without the other. For this reason, we will pair them together – as each pair makes one complete movement of the ritual journey.

ADVENT: Experience of Desire

A Thumbnail Sketch:

Advent is about joyful waiting. Our anticipation builds each Sunday as we wait through the darkness of injustice for the dawning of right relationship. We see a new vision for our world and for how we might live. Our focus is liberation, justice and peace, as embodied in the words of Mary's *Magnificat* (Lk 1: 46-55). What would our world be like if we allowed *this* God to become enfleshed in our society?

Interesting Facts:

Advent hasn't always been the beginning of the church's liturgical year. At first, the church celebrated only Sunday, a weekly celebration of the Lord's resurrection. However, probably from the mid-second century on, there is evidence of an annual celebration of the Lord's resurrection and, for a long time, the "beginning" of the liturgical year coincided with the Easter Vigil. It wasn't until about the tenth or eleventh centuries that Advent began to be considered the beginning of the liturgical year since, with a more historical mentality, it made sense to begin the liturgical year with the beginning of Jesus' earthly life. Christmas was introduced on the calendar in the fourth century.

Living Liturgy 2008, p5. Order of St Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota .

CHRISTMAS: Experience of Discovery

A Thumbnail Sketch:

Christmas is about the mystery of the divine found *within* the human ~ GOD entering our everyday life! Because Jesus Christ was born into our world in a normal human way, all our ordinary human activities are made holy. Jesus Christ has entered our story and saved us from the darkness! Imagine if we were to live always as if walking in the light!

Interesting Facts:

The word *Christmas* grew from the Old English *Christes messe* meaning the Mass of Christ. Sometimes we see the abbreviation *Xmas*. The X comes from the Greek letter *Ch* (the first letter of Christ's name) which has the form of a cross. Early Christians saw it as a symbol of the sufferings and death of Christ. So *Xmas* is not really just a secular term for Christmas.

There is no historical evidence to confirm that Jesus was in fact born on Dec 25. People began celebrating his birth at the time of the Northern hemisphere Winter Solstice. The symbol of Christ as the *light for the world* is quite literally experienced in the North. After the Winter Solstice (the shortest day of the year) the light of each day grows brighter and stays longer. The darkness recedes. Warmth and colour return to the earth. How can we adapt this strong symbol of light to our Southern hemisphere?

What do the Scriptures say?

from the 1st Sunday of Advent, Cycle A
(**Matthew 24: 37-44**)

Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

from the 2nd Sunday of Advent, Cycle B
(**Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11**)

Every valley shall be lifted up,
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

from the 3rd Sunday of Advent, Cycle C
(**Philippians 4: 4-7**)

Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

from the 4th Sunday of Advent, Cycle A
(**Matthew 1: 23**)

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'.

What is our Christian Tradition?

Advent comes at the end of our calendar year and at the beginning of our liturgical year. Because of this, the season suggests that we take time to reflect on the *past*, the *present*, and the *future*.

Advent is about the coming of Jesus:

- He comes as the human baby of Bethlehem
- He comes as King and Judge at the end of time
- He comes into our lives right NOW

In the Eastern Churches, Advent has a strong Marian focus. Mary is the model of a Church who looks towards Jesus and works to create the kind of world that Jesus proclaimed in the Gospels.

What do the Scriptures say?

from the Midnight Mass (used in all Cycles)
(**Isaiah 9: 1-7**)

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness –

on them light has shone.

For a child has been born for us,
a sone given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and his is named Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

from the Dawn Mass (all Cycles)
(Psalm 96)

A light will shine on us this day:
the Lord is born for us.

from the Day Mass (all Cycles)
(John 1: 4-5)

What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

What is our Christian Tradition?

In the 5th Century, when teaching on Christmas and the Epiphany, Augustine told his people: *Recently we celebrated the day on which Christ was born among the Jews; today we celebrate the day on which He was adored by the Gentiles.* (Sermon 199:1) *Thus, both feasts pertain to the revelation of Christ.* (Sermon 204:1)

In the 12th Century, French abbot, Geurric of Igny, preached: *That which we have celebrated up to today is the birth of Christ. That which we celebrate today (Epiphany) is our own birth. In the former, Christ was born, in the latter Christianity was born.* (Sermon 14:1)

Traditionally, the Church shows the close relationship of these events. Christmas, Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord are seen as one unit.

What does the Church today say?

Advent has a two-fold character: as a season to prepare us for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's second coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.

General Norms for the Liturgical year and Calendar #39

What does this mean for us now?

Advent is about waiting – we wait through the darkness of injustice for the dawning of right and clarity of living. The Scriptural images of Advent tell of a God who

- frees us from rigidity
- gives sight to our blindness
- feeds our hungering hearts
- sets us in equality with all people

Advent is the season when we intentionally practise hope, when we consciously act for justice, when we joyfully live in expectation of promises fulfilled.

Images and Echoes of Advent

Wake up! Stay awake! Be ready! Keep watch!

A voice crying out in the wilderness.

Wilderness budding forth and blooming.

The promise that Justice will flourish.

Mountains will be levelled and valleys filled in.

Crooked paths will be made straight.

Marana tha: Come, Lord Jesus.

Enter, the King of glory.

Rejoice!

God's Promise fulfilled.

Christ, the Radiant Dawn.

Christ, the Light of the world.

Advent figures: Isaiah, John the Baptist, Mary. *(NB: images in the Magnificat, Lk 1: 46-55)*

The "O" Antiphons *(from 7 final days of Advent)*

Symbols of Advent

Advent Wreath: 4 candles (3 blue, 1 pink) in a circle of greenery, lit progressively in each week of Advent, symbolises the light of Christ growing brighter as we progress towards Christmas.

What does the Church today say?

Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery, the Church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ's birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season. The Christmas season runs from the evening of Christmas Eve until the Sunday after Epiphany or after January 6, inclusive. The Sunday after January 6 is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

General Norms for the liturgical Year and Calendar #32, #33, #38.

What does this mean for us now?

"No one can celebrated a genuine Christmas without being truly poor. The self-sufficient, the proud, those who because they have everything, look down on others, those who have no need even of God – for them there will be no Christmas. Only the poor, the hungry, those who need someone to come on their behalf, will have that someone. That someone is God, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Without poverty of spirit there can be no abundance of God."

The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Oscar Romero.

Images and Echoes of Christmas

Emmanuel: God-is-with-us.

A Light has shone ...

Prince of Peace. Peace on earth.

New birth.

God enfleshed in us.

Christ: the radiant vision of God's glory.

Christ: the Revelation of love.

Christ: the Light of all peoples.

Christ: God's glory shining among us.

Symbols of Christmas

Crib: a visual reminder of the mystery of God entering our human experience.

Tree (a Germanic custom): An evergreen with lights to remind us that Christ is our light and our hope, alive and green even in the midst of the 'cold and darkness' we all experience at certain times in our lives.

In Advent, a small wreath-lighting ritual can begin the weekly prayer. Here is a text for each week of Advent as you are lighting the candles of the Advent Wreath.

Week 1

As we light the first candle in our Advent Wreath, we remind ourselves to 'stay awake' by the light of the Gospel that shines in our hearts.

Week 2

As we light the first two candles in our Advent Wreath, we 'prepare a way for the Lord' to come into our hearts this Christmas.

Week 3

As we light three candles in our Advent Wreath, we remember that in our blindness we will see, in our deafness we will hear, and in our dying we will be raised to new life - through the light of Christ, who has come into our world.

Week 4

As we light all of the candles in our Advent Wreath, we give thanks for Mary's Son whom she named Emmanuel – a name which means "God-is-with-us".

Stars of the Southern Cross: on a blue background, a star can be added each week of Advent – with the small star for Christmas.

The above texts could be adapted if using the Southern Cross instead of the Wreath:

As we place the first star of the Southern Cross in the Advent sky, etc.

Jesse Tree: represents the major events throughout the history of God's interaction with our ancestors in faith. It relates to those who awaited the Promised One. Jesse was the father of King David, from whose family tree Jesus was born.

Colours of Advent

Shades of blue or blue-purple are suited to Advent. In Nature, our jacaranda trees and agapanthus lilies bloom in Advent. Blue is also a traditional Marian colour, Mary being a key Advent figure. We can think of the colours of the sky as the dawning of the light approaches and so move out of darkness from greys through to a range of blues with a touch of pink. Add a new shade each week.

Gifts: Originating from the gifts of the 3 Wise Men, our small gifts symbolise the Gift of Life in all its fullness. We give gifts to our loved ones and we bring gifts to be distributed by the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Family: Families usually make an effort to come together over Christmas. We include those who have no families and those who are far from home. We mirror the love of the Holy Family in this season. The feast of the Holy Family falls on the Sunday after Christmas.

Boxing Day: comes from an old tradition of placing alms boxes around the Church over the Christmas period. These boxes were opened on Christmas Day and their contents distributed to those in need the day after.

Colours of Christmas

White and gold (the liturgical colours) signify rejoicing and victory, a new beginning.

Red and green are the more 'secular' colours of Christmas. The red could symbolise the royalty of the newborn king who will one day shed his blood for love of us and the green could represent the shoots of this new birth - the promise fulfilled.