

Advent and Me

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Introduction

Advent means *the coming* or *the arrival*. Advent is the first season of our Church's liturgical year and is celebrated during the four weeks before Christmas.

Advent should be a time of quiet, hope-filled waiting for the birth of Christ at Christmas. But instead Advent gets lost in the busyness of getting ready for Christmas celebrations. All those holiday ads and commercials draw you to the malls, the catalogs,

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and the online shopping. With all this focus on money and presents, we may not take time to get our hearts ready. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus. And that is way more important than all the stuff! Giving presents isn't bad, but every present we give should come from a heart that is celebrating the most important Christmas present of all—God's gift to us of Jesus Christ.

Here are some suggestions for making the Advent season more meaningful and prayerful. After reading the story of Advent and learning about some of its important symbols, you'll find ideas that will help make this special season more peace filled and prayer filled, even in the midst of all your baking, shopping, gift-wrapping, and celebrating.

The Story of Advent

Advent was originally a time when we fasted or gave up something to help us get ready spiritually for Christmas. It was a season of penance, like Lent. Advent is still a season of penance, but now it is also a time of *hope-filled expectation*, and that is just as important as the penance part.

Just as Mary waited for the birth of Jesus with joy and hope, so do we. We prepare for the coming of Christ in three ways. First, we tell the story of Jesus' humble birth of the past. Second, we notice and celebrate Christ's coming to us today through the Eucharist and through one another. Third, we wait with joy and hope for the time when Christ will come again at the end of time.

The Advent readings at Sunday Mass remind us to wait with hope and to prepare ourselves for Christ's coming. In the first half of Advent, the great prophet Isaiah and John the Baptizer remind us to make changes in our lives. We must "prepare the way of the Lord" (Mark 1:3) in our hearts by being more loving toward ourselves and others. We each have things we need to change about ourselves, and Advent is the perfect time to get going on them!

In the second half of Advent, the readings at Mass tell about the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. These stories fill us with Christmas excitement and joy. We never get tired of hearing these stories because they teach us to hope in God's love for us.

If we take time to think about the Christmas story, we can learn so much

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about what is important in life. As God's Son, Jesus could have come to live with us as a great king or a noble warrior, born in the warmth and comfort of a castle, dressed in royal garments, and tended by servants. But instead, God came to us as a tiny, powerless baby on a dark winter's night. He was born to a humble woman married to a simple carpenter. There was no room in the inn, so he was born in a shelter built for the animals. There were no maids or servants—only the loving care of his mother and father and the wonder-filled gazes of poor shepherds who somehow knew that this child was very, very special.

Question

- What is your favorite part of the Christmas story?