

The Meaning of Advent

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,
"who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

- Revelation 1:8 (ESV)



The season of Advent begins on the Fourth Sunday prior to Christmas Day and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent also marks the beginning of the traditional church year.

The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means "coming into." This is a celebration of Christ's coming. It's a season of anticipation leading up to Christmas.

Most of us are quite aware that this season is a time to celebrate the first coming of Christ at his birth. But the Advent season actually celebrates more than this. During Advent we celebrate at least three ways in which Christ comes to us.

The first way is, of course, when Christ came to us in the incarnation. This is called Christ's First Advent. This was the coming of the Messiah for which Israel had been longing. That's why much of the traditional scripture readings and songs for Advent come from the Old Testament prophets. We borrow their language to express our own longing for Christ to come again. As we celebrate Christ's birth we recognize that, by our union with Him, we participate in an event which took place 2,000 years ago. We are not pretending that Jesus hasn't been born yet, we are celebrating the historical event of his first coming.

The second way Christ comes to us is by his presence with us in this time between his First and Second Advents. The primary way Christ is now present with us is during our worship service each Lord's Day. We come together as his body and he ministers to us through Word and Sacrament (Matt. 18:20). Jesus also comes to us on a daily basis as he intercedes for us before the Father. Because Jesus remains in Heaven, this coming is made possible by the Holy Spirit who unites us to Jesus. In this way Jesus is always with us just as he promised (Matt. 28:20). Our celebration of Advent recognizes that Jesus continues to come to us by faith even now.

The third coming of Christ that we celebrate is his future coming, often called his Second Advent. Jesus told us that he would come again and take us to himself, that we might be with him forever (John 14:3). In the Nicene Creed the church proclaims: "He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end." Thus our Advent celebration also looks forward to the future, to the Last Judgment, and to God's restoration of all things through Jesus Christ (Rev. 21).

This is why the symbol which combines the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*Aleph*) and the last letter of the Greek alphabet (*Omega*), is often used during Advent (see top of page). It reminds us that Jesus fulfills both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures (Old Testament and New Testament). It also reminds us that Jesus is the beginning, center, and end of all things (Col. 1:15-20). He had a First Advent and He will have a Second Advent. Our celebration of Advent should cover all these aspects of Christ's coming.

Traditionally the color purple has been associated with Advent, with pink being used on the third or fourth Sunday to signify an increase in light as Christmas nears. Many churches today have switched to royal blue to create a greater distinction between Advent and the Season of Lent, which also uses Purple. Both Purple and Royal Blue are symbolic of kingship and thus remind us that Jesus is King of Kings. During this Advent season, our daily response to our coming King should be the same as that of the Apostle John: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

For more information concerning all aspects of Advent visit: www.cresourcei.org/cyadvent.html

A Children's Advent Catechism

Q1: What does the word *Advent* mean?

A: *Advent* means "coming."

Q2: Whose coming do we celebrate during Advent?

A: We celebrate the coming of Jesus.

Q3: How did Jesus first come to us?

A: Jesus first came to us at his birth.

Q4: How does Jesus now come to us?

A: Jesus now comes to us by his Spirit.

Q5: Will Jesus come to us again?

A: Jesus will come again and make all things new so that we can be with him.

Q6: What are the colors of Advent?

A: Purple and royal blue.

Q7: What do the colors of Advent mean?

A: They remind us that Jesus is our glorious king.

Q8: What do we pray for during Advent?

A: We thank Jesus for coming to us and we ask him to keep coming to us again and again as he promised.

Advent Hymns:

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus
Joy to the World!
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
The Advent of our God
Savior of the Nations, Come
Christ is Surely Coming
Arise, Sons of the Kingdom
Comfort, Comfort Ye My People
Creator of the Stars of Night
O Bride of Christ, Rejoice
O Savior, Tear the Heaven's Wide
Lo, He Comes With Clouds Descending
Wake, Awake the Night is Flying
Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

Scriptures for Advent

Isaiah 7:14 - "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Isaiah 9:6–7 - "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

Micah 5:2 - "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

Matthew 28:18–20 - "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Luke 2:11–12 - "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.'"

John 1:14 - "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 14:1–3 - "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for

you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 - "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Revelation 1:8 - "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Revelation 21:1–5 - "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Additional readings: Jer. 23:5–8; Mal. 4:1–6, Is. 40:1-11; Deut. 18:15–19; Psalm 24; 50:1–15; 85; 111; Rom. 13:8–14, 15:4–13; 1 Cor. 4:1–5; Phil. 4:4–7; Matt. 11:2-11; 21:1–9; Luke 1:39-56, 21:25-36; John 1:19–28.