



Discovering **hope** and **joy** in the Catholic faith.

Special Advent Edition

St. Joseph Church

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Accept the gift of Advent

Advent is a beautiful liturgical season we can use to prepare our hearts to welcome Christ when he comes again. This mystical time helps us to reconnect with God and his Church. It's sometimes called "Little Lent," because the Church considers it a season during which we refocus our lives using prayer, penance and almsgiving.

wreath models the expectation of Christ's coming.

The four candles (three violet, one rose) symbolize the four thousand years between the fall of Adam and Eve and Christ's birth. The rose candle, representing joy, is lit on the third Sunday of Advent (called Gaudete Sunday) to mark the halfway point of the season.

PREPARE

Try these suggestions to prepare for, reconnect with, and center on the expected Savior during Advent.

Start with Reconciliation

Many parishes host Advent Penance Services. If you can, attend one to share God's mercy with friends and neighbors. Otherwise, be sure to make



time for Confession before

Christmas so you can greet the newborn Savior with the joy of a clean heart.



Begin a Nativity Scene

A Nativity Scene is a visual reminder that "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Also known as a crèche, we think the custom of displaying the Nativity Scene began with St. Francis of Assisi as a way to illustrate the humility of Jesus' birth. To imitate his lesson, set out an empty stable and manger on the first Sunday of Advent. Each week, add figures: livestock, Mary, Joseph, shepherds and angels. On Christmas morning, place the Baby in the manger.

Pray the wait

Advent teaches us to wait and anticipate Christ's coming. "They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31). Hoping and waiting well are closely connected. Because we know God keeps his promises, we don't wait anxiously for him, but instead look forward to the fulfillment of his promises with joy. Advent is the time to practice waiting with joyful hope. Any time you have to wait in line, in traffic, for an appointment, or even for someone to reply to a text, pray. Praying the wait is hope in action.



Light a wreath

A simple way to mark the season, Advent wreaths are a time-honored tradition rich in symbolism. The circular shape of the wreath reminds us that God is eternal; he has no beginning and no end. The wreath itself is often made of evergreens, symbolizing everlasting life. Each week, an additional candle is lit, accompanied by Scripture-based meditations and prayers. The progressive lighting of the candles in the Advent



RECONNECT

Listen for God’s voice

Scripture is God speaking to us. During Advent, try reading an entire Gospel - or two. Short on time? Read the Gospel of St. Mark—the shortest of the four Gospels. Or, read a few lines each night and meditate on them. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how God is speaking to you through what you read.

Turn to the saints

For extra inspiration, turn to the saints whose feast days occur during the season of Advent: St. Andrew (November 30), St. Nicholas (December 6), the Immaculate Conception (December 8), St. Juan Diego (December 9), Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12), and St. Lucy (December 13). Research established customs for these feasts or develop your own. (Don’t forget, attendance at Mass is required for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.)



Advent reading

Challenge yourself to learn more about your faith and begin during Advent. Open your copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (or find it online) to the Glossary and locate a word or phrase that is unfamiliar. Read about it until you can explain it to someone else. For more spiritual reading suggestions, ask your parish priest or go to www.growinginfaith.com.

Offer intentions

Each day, read or listen to the news and jot down someone who particularly needs your prayers. Pray for her the entire day. The next day, add another person to your list and add him to your prayers. By the end of the four weeks, you should have quite a list of people for whom you are praying. Your prayers are powerful acts of love for people you may not even know.

Gifts for the Child

The Magi traveled a long way to greet the newborn King, making many sacrifices and suffering hardships to bring him gifts. During our Advent journey back to the heart of Christ, we can offer sacrifices and penance as gifts from our own hearts. Performing acts of service for friends or family, depriving ourselves of luxuries, giving money or food to the poor can be our royal gifts to the newborn King.



Reach out

The holidays are especially difficult for those who are alone or troubled. Include in your holiday gatherings those who might otherwise be alone. Or, consider volunteering at a nursing home, homeless shelter, or a pregnancy crisis center, for example. Look for Christ, who was also in need, in those you help.

CENTER

Travel light

Do you have a bad habit you would like to change? Would you like to stop using bad language? Gossiping? Viewing pornography? Feeling ungrateful? Advent is when we can become the people God intended us to be. Identify the first step you can take toward change and take it. The Holy Spirit will help.

Center around the Eucharist

“The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1324), because it is Christ himself—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. In addition to weekly Mass, add extra Masses during the Advent season.

Visit the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. Spend time with our Lord and talk to him as you would a beloved friend.



Pray the “O Antiphons”

Antiphons are the short Bible verses that come before and after a prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. Specifically, the “O” Antiphons are the verses said during the evening prayers for December 17-23. Each names a title for Jesus: Wisdom, Lord of Israel, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Radiant Dawn, King of All Nations, and Emmanuel. The song, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” is based on these antiphons.

Still the noise with sacred sounds

Drown out the secular music all around by creating your own playlist of music appropriate for Advent. Hymns such as, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus,” or “Creator of the Stars at Night,” can top the list – or whatever sacred music puts you in a contemplative frame of mind.

Quiet and contemplate

It’s easy to get caught up in the frenzy of activity that accompanies this time of year. Make time to find silence each day. Say “no” to unnecessary distractions so you can be open to God’s will for the next year.