



UNDERSTANDING ADVENT

01. WHEN AND WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and spans until Christmas Day. Each Advent season differs in length depending on where the first Sunday falls in the calendar.

The word advent means ‘coming’ or ‘arrival.’ The Advent season is an invitation to prepare for the celebration of the first coming of Jesus and in anticipation of His second coming. Often described as a season of “*the already and the not yet*,” Advent is traditionally a period of penitence and prayer, celebration and joy, hope and longing. It helps the Church to focus on both the gift of redemption and the hope of renewal and restoration.

02. HOW IS ADVENT EXPRESSED?

Throughout the ages, churches and families have marked the Advent season in various ways. Some use an “Advent wreath” to mark the Sundays of Advent—the wreath sits flat on an altar or table and a candle is lit each Sunday to emphasize themes like: hope, peace, joy and love. The final candle on the Advent wreath is known as the “Christ candle” and is lit on Christmas Eve. During Advent, congregations may celebrate through the singing of Christmas hymns, reenact the story of Jesus’ birth, decorate with greens or nativities and a host of other traditions.

An excerpt from the *Companion to the Book of Common Worship* says this about Advent*:

“In Advent we expectantly wait for the One who has already come. We anticipate the promised justice of God’s new world, yet we praise God who raised the ‘righteous branch’ to rule with justice and righteousness. We hope for the restoration of the afflicted, the tormented, and the grieving, yet we delight that healing has come in Christ. We long for the beating of swords into plowshares, yet we rejoice that the Prince of Peace has appeared. We yearn for the barren deserts of our inner cities to flourish, yet we laud the desert Rose that has bloomed. We dream of the land where lions and lambs live in harmony, yet we acclaim the child born to lead us into the promised land.”

Christ has come! Christ is risen! Christ will come again! In Advent, we are living between the first and the second coming of the Lord. The dialectical tension of maranatha [alternately translated ‘Come, our Lord!’ or ‘Our Lord has come!’]—placing us between memory and hope, past and future—may strengthen our Advent liturgies. Perhaps we need to cling to the ancient cry of maranatha! and its paradoxical meanings so we may freely embrace ‘the new thing’ prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 43:19) that God is doing among us right now. The tension and paradox we find in Advent shapes our celebrations during the season.”

03. HOW DOES ADVENT CONNECT TO THE FRONTIER?

As we reflect on Jesus’ arrival into our world, we remember the 2+ billion people around the globe who have yet to hear about Him or His love for them. The tension of Advent is tangible when we think of the frontier—someday, members of every nation, tribe, people and language will stand together in worship (Revelation 7:9), but we have not seen the complete fulfillment of this promise yet. Trusting that God is at work even among the world’s least-reached peoples and places, the Church actively waits with anticipation for that day. “*Come, Lord Jesus!*”

