

# ADVENT

## *Adventus Domini: the coming of the Lord*

In Advent, at the very beginning of the Church's Year, we watch for the coming of the Lord. With eager hearts we wait to celebrate again the birth of the Christ-child in Bethlehem. With hope and longing we look for the return of Christ in glory as judge and king and for the completion of God's new creation. With awe and wonder we yearn for Christ to enter our hearts and lives, to be born in us today.

Advent is a season of joyful expectation but it also has a reflective flavour.

- Church decorations are simple and spare, without flowers.
- Purple hangings and vestments are used, but to more to signal that God's ultimate purposes still await fulfilment than the penitence traditional in Lent.
- The 'Gloria in excelsis' is not normally used in the Eucharist.

*Times and Seasons* provides both complete services and helpful resources to use in your own seasonal worship. Some key phrases and themes are picked up in the headings below.

## *Marana tha! Come, Lord!*

The Aramaic cry of the earliest Christians resonates through our Advent liturgies. It echoes the yearning of Israel for its Messiah and proclaims both the impending excitement of Christmas and the passionate Christian hope for the coming of God's kingdom.

- ? How might we keep a creative balance between the reflective 'Purple' feel of Advent and the growing Christmas fever?

## *Sleepers, wake!*

As Advent begins it sounds an alarm calling us to wake from sleep. Advent is no time for passive waiting. We are called to be alert, to be prepared for the coming of the Lord.

Advent voices carry mixed messages. Isaiah, the Advent prophet, promises both joy and judgement. John the Baptist bears both the good news of the coming of Christ and a call to repent.

All through Advent, but particularly in the first half, we are invited to reflect on the 'four last things': death, judgement, heaven and hell. After 17th December the emphasis changes to preparation for the birth of our Lord.

## *O come, O come, Emmanuel*

The 'Great O' Antiphons have been used since the 8th century and consist of a scriptural verse and a concluding prayer. They are used as refrains for the Magnificat at Evening Prayer from 17th to 23rd December, but can be creatively used at any Advent service.

The O Antiphons heighten the anticipation of the coming of Christ by drawing from the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah and the titles given to him in the Old Testament. They form the basis of the Advent hymn 'O come, O come, Emmanuel'.

- ? What is your favourite Advent hymn? How does it shed light on the themes of the season?

## *From darkness to light*

Advent embraces the winter solstice, the darkest time of the year. Its expectant, hopeful mood is enhanced by the use of imagery which

reflects a turning from darkness to light and the coming of light into the darkness, reflecting our belief that in the darkness of sin a new light has dawned in Christ.

Darkness to light imagery is used in the liturgical language of the season. It may also be reflected in movement or actions. Some churches have processional services with movement from the west (darkness) to the east (light). Others may start the service in darkness and light candles gradually, from west to east, as the service progresses, supplementing with electric light where necessary.

- ? How might our church use the dramatic imagery of darkness and light in an Advent service (especially an evening one)?

## *Advent week by week in the lectionary*

Advent 1: We focus on the second coming of Christ.

Advent 2: We recall the life and ministry of John the Baptist, longing for the appearance of the Messiah as we prepare for the second coming.

Advent 3: Our focus is again on John the Baptist but this week the emphasis is on justice and judgement.

Advent 4: The news of the birth of Jesus is announced to Joseph and to Mary.

## **Advent Symbols**

Advent is rich in symbols, which provide themes and inspiration for planning of all-age and special services. There are plenty of books and websites with creative resources and ideas - see the resources leaflet for some of them.

It is a good idea to have a 'theme for the year', to avoid having lots of competing images. One

year you could focus on the Advent Wreath, in another make an Advent Calendar, in another a Jesse Tree and think through Israel's history. Other possibilities might be building on the light and darkness theme, or the creation of a road to Bethlehem, or using a travelling crib (see the Christmas leaflet).

Remember that children are often brought to church through Advent by adults who have little idea of the Advent or the Christmas stories, so include material for them in all-age services.

### ***The Advent Wreath***

Many churches have adopted the tradition of an Advent Wreath, a circular base decorated with evergreens which holds four purple candles and a central white candle. The purple candles are lit, one for each Sunday of Advent, and the central candle on Christmas Day. Some churches use a pink candle for Advent 3 which has traditionally been known as Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete means 'rejoice'. The medieval introit for Advent 3 was based on '*Rejoice, the Lord is near*' (Philippians 4:4-5).

### ***The Jesse Tree***

Some schools and churches celebrate the lead up to Christmas by making a Jesse Tree (either over several weeks or in one special service). A Jesse Tree is a tree, or symbolic tree, on which ornaments or objects (usually handmade) are hung. Each one represents an Old Testament event or person, and an explanation and a verse of scripture is given. Its name derives from Isaiah 11.1 '*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*'.

? Could we make a huge 5-window Advent Calendar, showing Advent themes?

### **Music in Advent**

This is the season for using short repeated songs expressing a sense of patient longing and expectancy (e.g. the Taizé chant 'Wait for the Lord' or Bernadette Farrell's 'Litany of the Word') or with a focus on darkness and light (e.g. John Bell's 'Kindle a flame to lighten the dark'). A song to use each week as candles are lit on the Advent wreath helps to give unity to the season; an example by Mark Earey to the tune of 'Angel voices' can be found on the RSCM website ([www.rscm.com](http://www.rscm.com)). The refrain of the classic Advent hymn 'O come, O come Emmanuel' can be used in imaginative ways, for example as an acclamation during the Eucharistic prayer.

As there is a custom of omitting the 'Gloria' at Advent Communion services it is an opportunity to make more use of a sung Kyrie.



### ***Christmas is coming ...***

Advent is a distinct liturgical season. But for many people Christmas celebrations are in full swing weeks before Christmas. Town centres switch on their lights, homes and businesses put up the tree. Schools, colleges and other organisations want to hold Christmas carol services during Advent.

Most churches will welcome those who want to celebrate in this way. However, it is important to look for ways in which the Advent mood of anticipation and preparation can be retained.

There's more about the overlap between Advent and Christmas in the 'Christmas' leaflet.

# The Christian Year



# Advent

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