

What is Advent?

Prepare for Jesus while waiting for Santa

by Annemarie Scobey

What is Advent? ‘Advent’, which comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning ‘coming’, originated as a time when converts would prepare themselves for Baptism through instruction prayer, fasting, and reflection. It is period of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus. We prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ both in the manger and in the Second Coming at the end of time. Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Purple or royal blue are the colors of Advent: purple dye was very difficult to make in ancient times, so it became a symbol of royalty. We use royal colors to welcome Christ the King. Because we welcome Christ with repentance, purple is also the color of repentance.

For children to sense that December is about more than waiting for Christmas, they need to feel the tenor of the household change. Advent is a season in itself, separate from Christmas; a quieter, more introspective season. Children can learn the rhythm of Advent just as surely as they can learn the joy of the Christmas season, but as with everything, children learn best through doing—through using their five senses to experience their world.

See Advent. An Advent wreath on the table, an Advent calendar on the wall, and a nativity set in the front hall are visual reminders of the season. Special children’s books that come out only during Advent are also a reminder that we are getting ready.

Hear Advent. While Christmas carols are all over the airways, Advent music is traditionally slower and more reflective. Try an instrumental CD during dinner, or download *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* on you iPod. Put on quiet music and read a book about the Christmas story to your child.

Smell Advent. Households with children rarely have candles burning every night, yet eating dinner by the light of the Advent candles sends a strong message that this is an important time. Even after the last candle is extinguished, the scent remains.

Taste Advent. Don’t save all the nice dinners for the Christmas season. A more formal family dinner around the Advent wreath on the Sundays of Advent shows the importance of the season to children.

Feel Advent. Each Sunday at Mass children experience Advent with the greater community. The readings, songs, colors, and Advent wreath will remind them that this holy time is one of preparation. Make it a family priority to attend Mass each of the four Sundays of Advent.



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