

Advent Has Come

This is the first week of Advent. For some Christians, Advent is four weeks of somber reflection and preparation similar to Lent (the self-examination time before Easter). For these Christians, the Christmas decorations and Christmas trees do not go up until Christmas Eve. They spend Advent examining themselves, renewing their promise to follow Jesus, and preparing their hearts to receive God's greatest gift anew. During Advent the coming of the light of Christ into the world is represented by the Advent candles. As their light increases each week, it illustrates growing anticipation and the joy that will come with the arrival of the Christ Child. Christmas Day begins 12 days of celebrations that conclude with Epiphany on January 6th. Epiphany marks the first revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles in the coming of the wisemen, and for some, a time to remember Jesus' baptism (January 6th also starts the season of Epiphany which lasts until Lent begins). For some, it is Epiphany not Christmas Day when gifts are given.

For other Christians, Advent is a time of preparation and celebration full of color and light. Decorations go up and the four weeks of Advent are joyful and busy as people get ready for the coming of the Christ Child and the big celebration of his birthday on Christmas day. It is Christmas Day which marks the climax of the season. For some who follow this tradition the tree and decorations come down before January and Christmas is put away until next year though its glow may continue into the new year.

Many of us combine elements from both these traditions and mix in some secular Christmas customs as well. It is easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of gift giving or getting the trimmings just right, and forget the world changing ramifications of the birth of that baby in a Bethlehem stable long ago. Sometimes our celebrating represents anything but the coming of the Prince of Peace it is meant to remember and proclaim. This year, with all its uncertainty and separation, presents a unique opportunity for reevaluating our Advent and Christmas practices as we look to find both meaning and comfort in the coming of Jesus. Look for ways to capture the joy of the season and recapture the loving and peaceful presence Jesus represents and calls us to emulate. Use the need to limit gathering as an opportunity to find new or renewed ways to be Christ to those around you so that all of the people we love will be able to share the joy of Christ's coming in the coming year.

This week, pray for:

- the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Help all of us continue to do all we can to keep each other as safe as we can. Remember those who are caring for the sick & the dying. Remember those who are suffering. Pray for those working on vaccines & treatments. Pray for those who are preparing for, planning for, & distributing vaccines when they become available.
- **Refugees and all who are homeless as winter comes.**
- **those dealing with storms, fires, flooding, earthquakes, & other disasters**
- **Those living with war** and all that living in a war zone means for civilians and soldiers. Especially pray for children who have never lived without war.



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