

The First Week of Advent Is A Special Time To Pray For Peace

Advent means “coming”. It is the four-week period before Christmas. Since the 9th century, the first Sunday of Advent has also been the day of the Christian year.



The earliest roots of Advent come from Gaul (France) where Advent was connected to the customs surrounding baptism, then part of the Feast of Epiphany on January 6th (the celebration of the coming of the wisemen, the revelation of Jesus to the gentiles; for some, also the baptism of Jesus). The weeks before baptism on Epiphany were a time of preparation, prayer, and fasting much like Lent. Strict self-discipline and self-denial were important parts of the preparation. This understanding of Advent traveled to England by the 8th century.

In the Roman church a different Advent custom developed. Advent was a celebration of the coming of Jesus into the world at Christmas. It was connected to liturgy and worship rather than self-sacrifice and fasting. The Roman tradition went to France in the 9th century where the two traditions were combined.

Now, during Advent we celebrate the historical event of Jesus' birth, and the coming of God in the flesh as a saving event. Therefore, Advent is both preparation time for Jesus' birthday, and the anticipation of His return to complete the work of redemption. It also combines a rich worship tradition with self-examination and renewal.

This year, we are very much in need of both Advent traditions. Nearly two years of disruption and struggle with the constant reality of COVID, have left us hungry for the fellowship and celebration we associate with Christmas. At the same time, the fear, anger, and frustration of these years have turned many of us in on ourselves. A need for control, and real self-preservation concerns have been overwhelming for many and robbed people of the fellowship and community everyone craves far more than COVID safety measures have. Many communities are tearing themselves apart with selfish blame games and rigid thinking rather than calling forth the best that is in all of us to get through and move forward together. As much as we need fellowship and celebration, we also need self-examination and prayer; openness and forgiveness so that we can renew the light of Christ in us and work together toward a better future for everyone. Seek renewal by spending time in the Scriptures; pray that those who most irritate you will be blessed this Christmas. Reach out to others – not just with food and resources for the needy, but also with a listening ear, a non-judgmental mind, and a loving heart, especially for people you disagree with. Work to put Christ in Christmas this year. Jesus came to bring people together not tear them apart.

Pray for:

- People facing flood, famine, drought, volcanic eruption, winter weather.
- Those living with violence – shootings, gang violence (including kidnapping), political violence, oppression.
- People living with discrimination
- People forced from their homes by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations. . . Especially remember the world's more than 82 million refugees & displaced people.
- Pray for those dealing with COVID. Case number are growing again (many hospitals are full again). The spread of COVID anywhere affects all of us. Stopping it depends on the actions of all of us.

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