

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope** and **joy** in the Catholic faith.

Special Advent Issue

One Minute Meditations

Why Advent?

Advent is a time of warning, a time of preparation, a time of urgency.



It is when the Church wants us to ask, "What do I need to do to be ready to greet the Lord?" We know Jesus will come at our death and he will come at the end of time. The season of Advent encourages us to make the necessary preparations so we can joyfully greet Jesus whenever we meet him next.

Grow in prayer

Our prayer life can mature and grow when we pray for intentions that are outside ourselves. For example, we can pray for the victims of war, the sick, for the people who don't believe in God, and for those in jails and prisons, whether we know them or not. The best kind of prayer is the kind that comes from the heart.

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins"
(Matthew 1:21).



Advent is preparing for something wonderful

Advent is a gift from the Catholic Church to let us know something wonderful is going to happen at Christmas. Yet in our impatience to get to that something wonderful, we can forget that the wait can be wonderful, too. Try taking it one week at a time and wait, hope, prepare, and rejoice at the miracle of Christ's wonderful birth ...

Week One – Wait.

Whenever you find yourself waiting for something this week, think of the fact that you are also waiting for Jesus to come. Ask him what you need to do to be ready for his arrival.

Week Two – Hope. This week

remember that God keeps his promises in ways more glorious than we can imagine. *"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Week Three – Prepare.

Look for ways to prepare your heart for Christmas. Go to Confession to ready your soul for God's grace. Reconcile with anyone you need to in order to increase your peace.

Week Four – Rejoice.

Sing "O Come, O Come Emanuel" at the top of your voice. Pray with enthusiasm at Mass. Spend time with family and friends. Write out a list of all the things in your life for which you are grateful. Welcome our Savior with a peaceful, joyful heart.



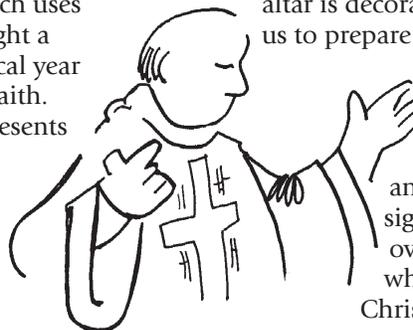
Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why is purple the color of Advent?

The Catholic Church uses visual aids to highlight a season of the liturgical year or a mystery of the faith. Purple - violet - represents a time of penance and preparation. During the weeks of Advent, the priest wears violet vestments and the

altar is decorated with violet to remind us to prepare penitentially for Christ's coming.

On the third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday), rose vestments and altar cloths are used to signal that Advent is almost over. This is a happy time when we anticipate the joy of Christ's coming.



Five ways to keep the season peaceful

Without our really knowing or intending it, the joy of Christmas can get lost in the wrappings and trappings of a hectic holiday. That's why the Church created Advent as the season for quiet and joyful preparation. Here are some ways to help savor the spirit of the season.

Plan ahead. Try to anticipate and avert the usual holiday problems. Sit feuding relatives at opposite ends of the Christmas dinner table. Plan how to handle guests who smoke.

Stay within your budget. Try postponing shopping as long as you can. You won't have the luxury of time to overbuy.

Stockpile gifts. Afraid of getting a gift without having one to give in return? Wrap and set aside a few extra batches of Christmas cookies just in case.

Make time for personal prayer. Throughout the season, make time for peaceful meditation and prayer – even if it's only a few minutes a day. Not only will it help defuse the tension, you'll be less frazzled when Christmas arrives.

When in doubt, sing. If you find your patience and good cheer running out, sing your favorite Christmas carol – the louder, the better. A little silliness might be the best antidote to holiday stress.

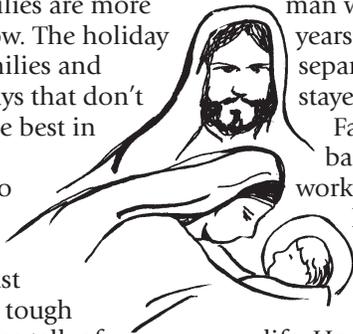


from Scripture

Luke 2:41-52, Families aren't always holy.

Perhaps there is no time during the year when our families are more challenged than now. The holiday brings together families and their baggage in ways that don't always bring out the best in us.

Perhaps it helps to remember that the Holy Family was a real family just like ours. They had tough times, too. There was talk of divorce when Joseph found out Mary was pregnant. Then they had trouble finding a place for Mary to give birth. Immediately afterwards, the family



fled to a strange land because a mad man wanted Jesus killed. Twelve years later, he and his parents were separated for three days when he stayed behind at the temple.

Families have good times and bad, and it takes every member working together to make a healthy family. One gift that strengthened the Holy Family was their cooperation with grace - the gift of God's divine life. How does that look in our own families? For a start, try for harmony in your family this year, and love them as a Holy Family, even if not everyone is singing along.

Use Advent well

Many of us look forward to Christmas all year but let Advent pass unnoticed. This quiet season can't compete with the lights, the joy, and the excitement of Christmas. Instead, why not use this year's season of Advent to prepare for Christmas? Look beyond what your eyes can see to focus on your inner preparations.

Keep watch. Jesus is coming. We know this because we celebrate his coming every Christmas. He will also come again in glory but we don't know when that will be. Advent reminds us to always be prepared for the coming of Christ. *"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths (Matthew 3:3)."*

Give the gift of yourself. This year

prepare the one gift for Jesus that he truly wants: YOU. Jesus thought each of us was worth love and his life. To him, we are a gift from the Father (John 17:24). Prepare yourself during Advent so that when he unwraps your gift on Christmas morning, it is the very best you have to offer — your love.

Break down barriers. Let go of anything that stands between you and your faith. Perhaps you have a bad habit or a companion who is a poor influence. Take the opportunity during Advent to make things right. Ridding yourself of opportunities for sin will help you be ready to greet the Savior when he comes.



Q & A

What is a traditional Advent Wreath?

The wreath is an ancient symbol of victory, in this case paying tribute to Christ's victory over sin. Candles in the wreath symbolize the light of Jesus' arrival which brought us out of the darkness of sin.



Three purple candles represent penance, sorrow, and longing expectation. The pink candle, lit on the third Sunday, is a reminder to rejoice, or in Latin "gaudete." That's why it is called Gaudete Sunday. It's the Church's way of letting us know that the best is yet to come.

Light one candle each night during the first week, two candles the second week, etc. Say a few prayers and read a passage from the gospel according to St. Luke to tell the scriptural story of the nativity. Take turns leading family prayers of hope and thanksgiving.

If hectic holiday schedules keep you from gathering as a family each night, be flexible about when you light the wreath. Try breakfast time, after school, or whenever you are all in one place at the same time.

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To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

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(Unless noted Bible quotes and references are from the Revised Standard Version and the New American Bible)