

ADVENT

Advent is a four week period prior to Christmas and it comes from the Latin word "adventus" which means coming or arrival. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and starts our spiritual preparation to celebrate the birth of Jesus. As during Lent, priests wear purple vestments, and the Gloria is omitted during Mass. The only exception is the Third Sunday of Advent, known as "Gaudete Sunday" when priests can wear rose-colored vestments.

The best known of all Advent symbols is the Advent Wreath, a custom originated among German Lutherans but was soon adopted by Catholics.

The Advent Wreath is basically a circular candle holder, decorated with evergreens and with four candles corresponding to the four Sundays of Advent and placed close to the altar. In some churches it can be suspended from the ceiling in front of the altar.

The Gospel that we hear on the First Sunday of Advent focuses on the end of time. Jesus urges his followers to be vigilant, because no one knows the day or the hour of the final judgement.

On the next two Sundays, John the Baptist calls us to repentance and conversion in order to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. Advent readings from the prophets, especially Isaiah, fill us with longing and hope for the promised Saviour.

The third Sunday tells us to "Rejoice! Indeed, the Lord is near!"

Finally, on the fourth Sunday, we reflect on Mary's role in the Incarnation. Her generosity of spirit inspires us to act with generosity too.

If we embrace the spirit of Advent and prepare ourselves, we can arrive at Christmas with our hearts full of Joy.