

8. Advent & the Liturgical Year

During Advent, Christians remember and celebrate the arrival of Jesus on earth and look forward in anticipation and hope for when he will return again at the end of time.

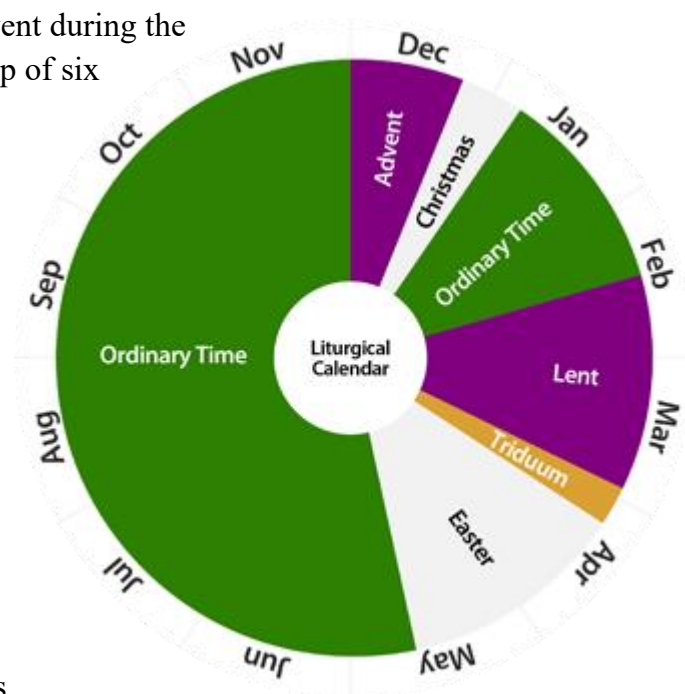
Key terms:

- Advent:** Latin 'adventus,' which means 'coming' or 'arrival' to signify "the coming of Christ into the world" or to "the liturgical period preceding Christmas"; it may also refer to the "Second Coming" of Christ (the "Advent of our Lord").
- Messiah:** messiah, (from Hebrew *mashiah*, "anointed"). It embodies the Jewish hope of a coming deliverer of the Davidic line predicted in Old Testament prophecy, which was fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.
- Liturgical Cycle:** consists of a cycle of liturgical days and season that determines when feast days are observed, themes for preaching, and scriptural writings.
- Liturgical Year:** divides the year into a series of seasons, each with their own mood, theological emphasis, and prayer.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Each liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent during the preceding calendar year. The liturgical year is made up of six seasons:

- Advent** Four weeks of preparation before the celebration of Jesus' birth.
- Christmas** Recalling the Nativity of Jesus Christ and his manifestation to the peoples of the world.
- Lent** A six-week period of penance before Easter.
- Sacred Paschal Triduum** The holiest "Three Days" of the Church's year, where the Christian people recall the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Easter** 50 days of joyful celebration of the Lord's resurrection from the dead and his sending forth of the Holy Spirit.
- Ordinary Time** Divided into two sections (one span of 4-8 weeks after Christmas Time and another lasting about six months after Easter Time), wherein the faithful consider the fullness of Jesus' teachings and works among his people.



Liturgical Colours

Green

Green is the colour of “Ordinary Time,” symbolising life, hope, and anticipation.

Red

Red is typically worn during Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Pentecost, symbolising God’s Love, blood, fire, and celebrations of Martyr.

White/Gold

Worn during Christmas and Easter, white or gold signifies the birth and resurrection of Christ. White symbolizes purity, light, glory, and joy. White is also a colour worn during the celebration of feast days associated with saints who lived virtuous lives.

Violet/Purple

Purple is the colour worn during Advent and Lent, and the celebration of funeral Masses. It symbolizes penance, sacrifice, and preparation.

HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION IN IRELAND

- Immaculate Conception (8th December)
- Christmas Day (25th December)
- Epiphany (6th January)
- St Patrick (17th March) (2008 – 15th March, because 17th falls in Holy Week)
- Assumption of Our Lady (15th August)
- All Saints (1st November)

Please note: In Ireland since October 1996, the Irish Bishops’ Conference removed the obligation on the feasts of Ascension and the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), and the consequent transfer of these two feasts to the following Sundays in accordance with universal liturgical law.

LITURGICAL READINGS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF ADVENT

First Sunday of Advent - The readings look forward to the "End Times" and the coming of the "Day of the Lord" or the "Messianic Age"; the Gospel is an excerpt from the Apocalyptic Discourse of Jesus in one of the Synoptic Gospels.

Second Sunday of Advent - The Gospel readings focus on the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist as the precursor or forerunner of Jesus, the one who came to "Prepare the Way of the Lord," by calling the people to turn back to God.

Third Sunday of Advent - The Gospel readings continue to focus on John the Baptist, who talks about the one who is to come after him, while the first and second readings convey the joy that Christians feel at the world's salvation through the incarnation of the Saviour.

Fourth Sunday of Advent - The Gospels tell of the events that preceded and prepared for the birth of Jesus, including the dreams of Joseph (Year A), the Annunciation (Year B), and the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Year C).

THE ADVENT WREATH

Advent wreaths traditionally include three purple/violet candles and one pink/rose-colored candle, which are arranged evenly around the wreath.

Some Christian traditions assign specific symbolism to each of the candles:

- 1) The Prophet's Candle, symbolizing Hope;
- 2) The Bethlehem Candle, symbolizing Faith;
- 3) The Shepherd's Candle, symbolizing Joy;
- 4) The Angel's Candle, symbolizing Peace.

Symbolism of foliage:

Laurel victory over persecution and suffering.

Pine immortality

Cedar strength and healing.

Pine cones life and resurrection.

Holly crown of thorns (the German name for holly is Christdorn meaning 'Christ-thorn').

Red berries the drops of blood which Jesus shed for us.

The circular shape of the wreath (a crown of thorns) also stands for eternity (without beginning or end). The wreath as a whole is meant to remind us of both the immortality of our souls and God's promise of everlasting life to us through Christ.

EXPLORE!

Explore with the candidates various ways in which they can prepare during the Advent season for the celebration of Christmas. How do these preparations nurture a spirit of anticipation and hope?

Advent and the Liturgical Year— Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean to wait with expectant hope? Why should Christians wait in anticipation for Christ's Second Coming?
2. What does it mean to 'hope'? Explore the difference between a 'wish' and a 'hope'.
3. What is the hope you have based on? (i.e. How do you know the things that you hope for will come true?)

4. Discuss the meaning of 'light in the darkness'. What does light in the darkness mean for the world at this time?
5. What does it mean to listen to the prophets in this season—not just the prophets of old, but the prophets of today? Who is crying out for justice and peace from the margins, and what will I do to heed their calls?

PRAYER

Pray: Isaiah 9:1-8

or

Gospel Reflection: First Sunday of Advent
Year A Mt. 24:37-44
Year B Mk. 13:33-37
Year C Lk. 21:25-28, 34-36

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Scripture

Advent

- Is. 7:14 A sign! The virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel.
- Is. 11:1-10 A shoot from the stock of Jesse on whom the Lord shall rest.
- Is. 9:6-7 The Prince of Peace will sit on the 'throne of David'.
- Is. 9:2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.
- Is. 40:1-11 God comforts his people.
- Mic 5:2 From among the clans of Judah will come a ruler.
- Amos 9:11-13 God will restore the city of David.
- Jer. 33:14-16 A branch shall spring for David, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely.
- Mt. 1:18-25 The fulfilment of the ancient prophecies.
- Mt. 3:1-12 The voice that cries in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight'.
- Mt. 2:3-6 Herod summons wise men from the east as they search for the 'sign' foretold in the prophecies.
- Lk. 1:26-38 Mary's *fiat* and the reassurance of the angel: 'Mary, do not be afraid, you have found God's favour.
- Jn. 1:14 The word became flesh and lived among us.
- Jn. 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, he gave his only son.
- Gal 4:4-5 When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman to redeem the world.
- Eph. 2:12-22 When humanity was separated from Christ and the covenants of promise, God gave hope to the world through the blood of Christ.

Liturgy

- Ex. 23:14-19 Observance of the annual feasts
- Ex. 23:10-13 Directions for constructing the altar for liturgical worship.
- Ps. 63:1-4 The Lord dwells in the sanctuary.
- Heb. 8:5 Moses makes the earthly place of worship a "copy and shadow of the heavenly things".
- Is. 8:1-8 Isaiah is commissioned and shares in the heavenly liturgy.

Catechism

- 484-511 Jesus' incarnation and the importance of Mary in salvation history. Jesus is established as the New Adam (504)
- 514 During Advent, the Church makes present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah.
- 524 The two-fold meaning of "coming": making present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah and the ardent desire for His second coming.
- 1095 The celebration of the Church's liturgy recalls the events of salvation history in the 'today' of her liturgy.
- 1163 Through the liturgical seasons, the Church celebrates the saving work of the Saviour.