What is Advent?

Of all the seasons in the church calendar, Advent probably feels the most familiar. Many people, regardless of faith, have used an Advent calendar—the ones with little windows to help you count down the days until Christmas. Yet, even though Advent is certainly about anticipating the coming of the Messiah, we don't seem to be very good at it, and what we generally call "Advent" looks pretty different than what the church historically has called "Advent."

Formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival," Advent is the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus in humility and the anxious awaiting of His second advent in glory. The season is a time for remembering and rejoicing, watching and waiting. In American Christianity, we've got that first part down. As soon as Thanksgiving is over (and sometimes even before), we start putting up the tree and listening to our favorite Christmas songs.

There's nothing wrong with doing these things, of course, but the whole point of Advent is to spend several weeks—four weeks, to be exact—preparing for Christmas instead of celebrating Christmas. It's about stepping into the shoes of the Israelites, longing and crying out for the Messiah to come. It's about reflecting on our sin and shortcomings and our need for a Savior. It's about looking around at our broken world and hoping for the second coming of Jesus. And, once we get to Christmas Day, the celebration of Jesus' birth becomes that much more spectacular and meaningful.

As we remember and enter the story of the coming of Jesus Christ, we deconstruct and deny the false stories that we find ourselves caught up in, especially those connected to our culture's concept of Christmas—individualism and consumerism. Instead, we reconstruct and embrace the true story of the gospel in our lives, specifically the focuses and themes of Advent. We recognize the weight of sin personally, corporately, and cosmically and understand why we need Jesus Christ, Immanuel, to dwell among us, restoring and reconciling creation back to the Father by the Spirit. Celebrating the Son of God coming as a gift, not to be served but to serve, we respond out of praise and gratitude, using this season to serve and to give to others.

History & Traditions

The Advent season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues up to Christmas Day, or Christmas Eve.

There are a variety of ways to celebrate the season, depending on tradition and background. Many people use an Advent calendar, typically made up of 24 "windows" containing Scriptures, stories, poems, or gifts, to count down the days until Christmas. As each window is opened and the final day draws closer, our expectation increases. This reminds us of the hopeful, yet anxious waiting God's people experienced as they longed for the promised Savior to come.

Another popular tradition is marking the progression of the season through an Advent wreath made up of five candles. (This is the tradition we will follow with this devotional.) This symbol is borrowed from the emphasis throughout Scripture of Jesus Christ being the Light of the world (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9; 8:12).

Each week, a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The last candle, called the Christ candle, is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to represent Jesus' first advent. Through this theme of ever-increasing light penetrating the darkness, we see a picture of the gospel.

Regardless of the tradition, Advent is a significant time in the life of the church. It's an opportunity for believers to remember God's promise to send One who would overcome sin and death forever. God promised a Savior, and He kept that promise perfectly.

If you have never celebrated advent, here is a shopping list you can use to prepare.



Pine, Berry & Pinecone Wreath
Size: 24"
SKU: 5079389
IN STOCK
$19.99 ~~$39.99~~



Advent Wreath Metal Taper Candle Ring Frame
SKU: 5575618
IN STOCK
$2.99 ~~$5.99~~



Purple & Pink Advent Taper Candles
SKU: 5097407
IN STOCK
$3.49 ~~$6.99~~



Glass Taper Candle Holder
SKU: 2289429
IN STOCK
$2.99

Taper Candle
Color: White **Dimensions:** 12"
SKU: 606384
IN STOCK
$1.69