

## ADVENT

### Introduction

Advent is a relatively late development in the history of Christian worship, dating from the sixth century. While the focus of the season is the Coming of the Lord, there have been decidedly different approaches to the season over the centuries. The earliest emphasis, and that favored by some scholars currently, is on a festal theme - the joyous anticipation of the Lord's Coming. The other emerged rather quickly, and this is the emphasis on Advent as "Christmas Lent" (as it is still understood in the Eastern Orthodox Churches). The latter carried with it a penitential character and was more somber in its approach to the celebration.

Regardless of one's interpretation of the season's thrust, festal or penitential, there can be no question that its theological basis is hope. Thus, the hope that the Christian has in Christ's coming, through both the Incarnation and expected return, should be in the mind of the worship planner. The traditional, penitential color, for Advent is purple. In recent years there has been a recovery, from Sarum usage, of the color blue - the color of heaven and hope. Either color is liturgically acceptable.

It is also important to remember that Advent marks the traditional beginning of the Christian year. Each Advent reminds us to reset our liturgical clocks, as it were, and to once again work through the wonderful story of God's desire to enter into encounter with humanity.

There are abundant resources for the observance of the Advent season. The *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church and the *The Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church -USA both contain 'prayers of the day,' collects, Scripture sentences, and the appropriate prayers for celebrations of the Lord's Supper.

The Advent Wreath has become a popular way of symbolizing the coming of God's Light into the world. The four candles (three purple or blue and one rose) can be said to symbolize hope, faith, joy and peace. The fifth (white) candle in the center symbolizes Christ. The first two Sundays one of the purple/blue candles is lit. The third Sunday a rose candle is lit to remind us of our joy and that the season is coming to its completion. The final Sunday a purple/blue candle is lit. Finally, the Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Day. It is customary to change the candles to white for the Sundays following Christmas until Epiphany (January 6 or the Sunday closest).

## LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH (sample)

### First Sunday

*One voice:* O Israel, hope in the Lord both now and forever (Psalm 131.3)

*Second voice:* We light the candle of hope. (light the first candle)

*Many voices:* Come to us, O Lord, for your people wait. Lighten our darkness and renew our hope in you. In the Name of the Coming One. Amen.

### Second Sunday

*One voice:* A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all humankind shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 40:3-5)

*Second voice:* We light the candle of faith (light the second candle)

*Many voices:* We wait for you, O Lord, as we wait for the rains. Come down upon us like the gentle dew, water our faith and help it to grow. We hear the voice crying and believe in the coming of the One who will reveal your glory in us, and in his name we pray. Amen.

### Third Sunday

*One voice:* Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all. (Philippians 4:4-5)

*Second voice:* We light the candle of joy. (light the rose candle)

*Many voices:* Our joy grows brighter and brighter with the light, of this wreath, O Lord. May our joy know no bounds and be made full by the presence of the Savior for whom we wait and in whom we pray. Amen.

### Fourth Sunday

*One voice:* Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of glad tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not: say to the cities of Judah: "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord comes with might, with an arm to rule: behold, God comes bearing the reward, preceded by the recompense.

*Second voice:* We light the candle of peace (light the fourth candle)

*Many voices:* Speak peace to us, O Lord, as you have spoken comfort through prophets and sages of old. Now, we ask you, speak peace to our hearts so that we may know your glory within us and around us. Be our Ruler and may your presence be our reward. Amen.

### **Christmas Eve or Christmas Day:**

*One voice:* For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

*Second voice:* We light the candle of love (light the Christ candle)

*Many voices:* Your love, O Lord, is among us. We have waited and watched in faith and hope. We have sought to be bringers of your peace. Now we know the wonder of your love born for us, born in us, this day, Christ the Lord; in whose name we pray. Amen.

## **CHRISTMAS**

### **Calls to Worship**

Behold, the Morning Star of heaven;  
Among beasts of the earth he is stabled.  
The all-seeing eyes have closed in sleep.  
The fullness of eternity is sealed in skin.  
He who cradled all worlds is himself cradled in a mother's arms.  
Behold, the one true God, is among us.

He was born in a stable, but at his birth the angels sang, and kings paid homage.  
He lived a simple life as a carpenter, but soon the world would know that he was the Son of God.  
He lived a life of love and died a death of shame.  
But the life he lived was for our instruction; the death he died was for our redemption.  
Lord, be born anew this Christmas:  
In me, in you, in us. Amen.

### **Invocations**

Almighty God, you who were once distant and unapproachable have now come close. You who are mighty and majestic have come to us as a helpless baby. All this you have done so we may finally understand your love. Grant, this day, that we may share in a rebirth of faith. Teach us to recognize you in all your fullness - near and distant, powerful and tender. We pray these things in the name of the One who was sent, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

O God of light and of love, open us to the wonders of your love, which we celebrate this day in simple stories and familiar songs. Speak to us in these words and songs and lift our hearts to you. Amen.

## **EPIPHANY**

### **Calls to Worship**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

May the splendor and glory of Christ shine upon us.

Let us be bathed in the light and love of Christ! Praise the Lord!

Arise, beloved, and shine, for our light, the light of life, has come into the world.

And the glory of the Lord is revealed.

God brings light for us to release us from the darkness.

God brings light to lead us, just as he did for the people in their exodus flight. Let us worship God.

Arise, children of God: for our light has come, and the glory of the Lord is revealed. Lift your eyes and behold.

From the rising of the sun to its setting, God's Name shall be great among all the nations.

### **Prayers**

O God, light of the world, desire of all nations, shepherd of our souls; let your light shine in the darkness, so all the ends of the earth may see your salvation. By the lifting of your cross, gather the people to your obedience so there may be one flock, one shepherd, one holy kingdom of righteousness and peace. Stir our hearts so that by our prayers, our gifts, and our labors, we may have part in spreading your Gospel; and hasten the time when all people shall come together to worship you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of all glory, by the guidance of a star you led the Wise Men to worship the Christ Child. By the light of faith lead us to your glory in heaven. We ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Holy God, in this season that commemorates the life and ministry of Jesus, remind us that his ministry I always and ever actively reaching out toward us. And in this hour of worship, help us to be open to the challenges of his words, the power of his healing, and the opportunity to labor alongside him as both Savior and friend. In his holy name.

Amen.

## **BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

### **Calls to Worship**

We have come to worship God in all glory.

We have come to worship the Lord.

The voice of the Lord echoes throughout the whole earth; even the waters obey His commands!

The voice of the Lord is powerful and majestic. Let us praise the name of the Lord!

Sing, oh blessed ones; sing praise God's name;

We have gathered to tell the people; we will tell the good news of salvation every day.

Proclaim God's glory to the nations, then, and tell creation of God's Beloved Son.

We will speak of God's marvelous deeds to all peoples. Come, let us worship the Lord!

### **Prayers**

Merciful God, your Son came forward to be baptized in the Jordan, to be cleansed with sinners. He came to seek out those who were lost and alone, and to reconcile humanity to You forever. May we who have also passed through the baptismal waters find strength to walk his path, and echo his goodness, reaching out in his name to those who need You. We pray these things in the one You called Beloved. Amen.

O God, just as Your Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, so release Your Spirit to us this day. Keep us always faithful to him who You called Beloved, for we proclaim him as Lord, forever and ever. Amen.