

December magazine

At the end of November, we reached Advent Sunday and the beginning of the new church calendar. A bit odd you might think as the normal calendar has another month to run!

So, what is Advent and what is the season for? Advent is a season observed in most Christian denominations as a time of waiting and preparation for both the celebration of Jesus's birth at Christmas and the return of Jesus Christ at the Second Coming. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, Advent Sunday. The word comes from the Latin 'adventus' meaning 'coming; arrival', translating the Greek 'parousia' from the New Testament, originally referring to the Second Coming. The season of Advent in the Christian calendar therefore anticipates the "coming of Christ" from three different perspectives: the physical nativity in Bethlehem, the reception of Christ in the heart of the believer, and the Second Coming.

Practices associated with Advent include Advent calendars, lighting an Advent wreath, praying an Advent daily devotional, erecting a Christmas tree, lighting a Christingle, as well as other ways of preparing for Christmas, such as setting up Christmas decorations, a custom that is sometimes done liturgically through a hanging of the greens ceremony.

Since the 13th century, the usual liturgical colour in Western Christianity for Advent has been violet. The readings for the first Sunday in Advent relate to the Old Testament patriarchs who were Christ's ancestors, so some call the first Advent candle that of hope. The readings for the second Sunday concern Christ's birth in Bethlehem and other prophecies, so the candle may be called the "Bethlehem candle", the "way candle", or the "prophets' candle". The third Sunday in Advent, Gaudete Sunday is

named after the first word of the Philippians 4:4, is celebrated with rose-coloured vestments similar to Laetare Sunday at the middle point of Lent. The readings relate to John the Baptist, and the rose-coloured candle may be called the "joy candle", "Mary candle", or "shepherds' candle". The readings for the fourth Sunday relate to the annunciation of Christ's birth, for which The Magnificat or "Song of Mary" may be sung or said. The candle may be known as the "angel's candle". Where an Advent wreath includes a fifth candle, it is known as the "Christ candle" and is lit during the Christmas Eve service.

So, what does Advent mean to you? The true meaning of Advent hopefully goes beyond, chocolate Advent calendars, festive decorations and frantic countdowns to Christmas. It's a sacred season of anticipation, reflection, and preparation rooted in Christian tradition. In a fast-paced world, Advent invites us to pause, reconnect with our spiritual roots, and find deeper purpose. Advent teaches us to embrace waiting as an active, meaningful process. Unlike the instant gratification of modern life, Advent encourages patience and trust in God's timing. For example, families lighting the Advent wreath each Sunday create shared moments of reflection, fostering connection and purpose. Each Advent candle represents a core virtue: hope, peace, joy, and love. In a world facing uncertainty, these values resonate deeply. Advent counters the commercialization of Christmas when instead of focusing on material gifts, it emphasizes spiritual preparation such as practicing daily Advent devotions which can shift focus from consumerism to gratitude.

So, in the busy time up to Christmas, take time to anticipate, pause, and wait with patient trust. Reflect on the great virtues and give thanks for what you have in the world and so by embracing Advent's call to reflection and

hope, we can enter Christmas with renewed purpose.
Whether through lighting a candle, reading a scripture, or serving others, the true meaning of Advent transforms the season into something sacred.

May you all have a blessed, peaceful and joyful Advent and Christmas.

Rev James