

Topic: Advent

IHM

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and the Son,
and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

As new Catechumens and Candidates, and
in the Spirit of Thanksgiving, let's go
around and share one thing we are
thankful to God for this day. "Loving
God, we give you thanks for..." (When
all have shared—"Amen!")

What is Advent?

- Advent, from Latin “Adventus” meaning “coming/arrival.”
- A 4 “week” period (4 Sundays before Christmas) of preparing our hearts for Christ’s coming at Christmas.
- The predominant liturgical color of Advent is purple, which is both a symbol of repentance, and of royalty—symbolizing our preparations to receive Christ our King!
- Christmas is a celebration of the Incarnation; God taking on human flesh and dwelling among us.



Advent Wreath



- 4 candles, corresponding to the liturgical colors of the season; the first two are purple/violet, the third is pink/rose, and the fourth is purple/violet.
- The pink candle is lit on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, called “Gaudete Sunday,” which is Latin for “Rejoice,” and signals that we are more than halfway there to Christmas!
- On each Sunday of Advent you light the corresponding candle, and continue until all candles are lit.
- Usually the candles are placed within a circular evergreen wreath, symbolizing God’s love which never “dies,” and is as continuous as the circle.
- Sometimes a white candle is placed in the center of the wreath and lit on Christmas, announcing the joy of Christ’s birth!

Advent Calendar

- A way to count down the days to Christmas.
- Usually begins Dec. 1st, but could be started whenever the First Sunday of Advent begins.
- A piece of candy, or small toy, is usually discovered hidden behind a “door.”
- Helps children open the “doors of their hearts” to the hidden Christ child waiting within.
- Fosters patience, joy, and excitement for what is to come! (The main themes of Advent.)



Advent Paper Chains/Straw



- Paper Chains—each child does a good deed, write it on a strip of construction paper, and staple it into a chain. The goal is to increase our charity and preparation for Jesus, by acting and being like Jesus. As the chain grows, it reminds us of our interconnectedness with one another as well.
- Paper Straw—similar to the idea above. In this case, a crib, or manger is set up in the home, and every time a child does a good deed, they write it on a gold strip of construction paper and place it in the manger. The goal/idea is to prepare a soft bed of “straw” for baby Jesus through our good deeds by Christmas.

Advent/Christmas Trees

- Christmas Tree—originally a German tradition; based on connecting Jesus' Incarnation and salvation to a reversal of the Genesis story of humanity's sin and fall.
- Giving Tree—a way of connecting Christ's gift of salvation, and our call to generosity and justice for the poor.
- Jesse Tree—a way to connect Jesus' story, with the story of the Jewish people, and God's long history of covenantal love for humanity.



Nativity Creche



- Popularized by St. Francis of Assisi (Italy).
- Manger scene depicting Jesus' birth, including figures of Mary, Joseph, Magi, Shepherds, Angels and various animals (sheep, camels, ox, donkey).
- Ox and ass from Isaiah 1:3; do we recognize who this child being born is?
- Wonderful way to practice imaginative prayer, placing ourselves in the scene or imagining ourselves as one of the characters in the story.
- Baby Jesus is usually placed in the scene on Christmas morning; the Magi can be reserved, or brought closer each day, until the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th (God being made manifest to the Gentiles).
- The "12 Days of Christmas" are from Dec. 25-Jan. 6.

Feast of St. Nicholas—Dec. 6th

- The original “Santa Claus!”
- St. Nick—Bishop of Myra (Greece)
- Known for his great charity to the poor.
- Poor girls lacked money for a dowry, Bishop Nick tossed some gold coins in through the window, landing in their stockings which were hung to dry by the fire.
- Tradition of putting out shoes/socks the night before, and receiving a small treat from St. Nick.
- Also reminds us that Advent is a season of charity and remembering the poor and forgotten.





Good King Wenceslas

- A real King from the Czech Republic.
- His goodness and his beliefs in Christianity infuriated his mother, and his brother murdered him on the Church steps.
- Before he died he asked for God's mercy for his brother's evil act.
- Reminds us that Advent is a time to make amends, to forgive and to be forgiven.

Boxing Day—Dec. 26th

- British tradition.
- Children used to go round collecting money in clay boxes.
- When the boxes were full, they broke them open.
- Boxing day derives its name from the practice of opening the alms boxes in church and distributing the money collected amongst the poor in the parish.





Celebrating with all Creation

- A sheaf of grain is often tied to a pole, together with nuts and seeds and placed in the garden for the birds. (Finland)
- Reminds us that God came into our world, sanctifying (making holy) all of creation!
- It is also a reminder of God's command in Genesis to be good stewards of creation.

La Posada & Poinsettias

- Mexican/Spanish traditions.
- La Posada is a religious procession that reenacts the search for shelter by Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus.
- Celebrated each of the 9 days leading up to Christmas.
- Reminder of our call to hospitality and welcoming the strangers among us as Christ himself.
- Poinsettia—legend of poor boy with nothing to give, picked some leaves and placed at Jesus' manger; they miraculously turned red!





Other Advent/Christmas Traditions From Around The World

- Lebanon/Middle east—about two weeks before Christmas people plant seeds - chickpeas, wheat grains, beans, lentils - in cotton wool, then water them. This “new growth” is placed near the manger.
- Holland—horns are blown over the water at Christmas to announce the birth of Christ.
- China—elaborate paper ornaments are made, and firecrackers lit at Christmas time.
- Africa—on the eve of Christmas, children march up and down the streets singing Christmas Carols and shouting "Christ is coming, Christ is coming! He is near!"

O Antiphons—Dec. 17-23

December 17

O Wisdom of our God Most High
guiding creation with power and love:
come to teach us the path of knowledge!

December 18

O Leader of the House of Israel,
giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
come to rescue us with your mighty power!

December 19

O Root of Jesse's stem,
sign of God's love for all his people:
come to save us without delay!

December 20

O Key of David,
opening the gates of God's eternal
Kingdom:
come and free the prisoners of darkness!

December 21

O Radiant Dawn,
splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
come and shine on those who dwell in
darkness and in the
shadow of death.

December 22

O King of all nations and keystone of the
Church:
come and save man, whom you formed
from the dust!

December 23

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
come to save us, Lord our God!

(7 Images from the Old Testament, relating
Jesus to be the promised Messiah.)

Discussion Questions

- Please share:

- What struck you from today's Mass readings?
- Every Advent season is about hope and preparing to receive Christ in our lives—how does this take on an even deeper meaning now that you are officially a Catechumen/Candidate preparing to receive Jesus in the sacraments this Easter?
- What are some of your favorite Advent/Christmas traditions and memories?
- What ideas/traditions from your reading and/or our presentation do you think you might want to incorporate into your preparation for Christmas this year?
- What questions did this topic and readings raise in your heart or mind?

Closing Prayer:

I AM NOT WORTHY TO HAVE YOU COME UNDER MY ROOF—Fr. William Breault, SJ

Lord Christ,
I wish I could offer You a reasonably clean
and swept house to dwell in, but I can't.
I can say—and know the meaning of—
"I am not worthy to have You come
under my roof . . ."
But You are already there!
Living among the once-flourishing idols.
The floor is dirty
and at times the room is airless—
even for me!
I am ashamed of Your presence there,
yet You slept in a cave
and on a donkey's back at night
under the desert stars.

So, if I can't change Your accommodations,
let me rejoice all the same
that You are present.
I must believe strongly, Lord,
that I can't question this:
that You are at home with sinners—
and my greatest sin, Lord Christ,
is that I don't want to be a sinner!
Nor do I easily accept it—still,
the evidence is overwhelming.
But hope is like a green shoot
in the midst of an airless, disordered world.
And that hope comes from Your Spirit.
I rest in that hope, Lord.
Amen.