

Advent: Preparing Our Hearts to Receive the Lord Jesus

Meaning

“Advent” is derived from the Latin word meaning “coming,” i.e. preparing our hearts to celebrate the coming of Jesus, God in human form, to save us from our sins.

Origin

In the fifth century, there were six Sundays of preparation in Gaul (France) and five Sundays of preparation in Spain and most of Italy. Eventually, the church at Rome reduced the five Sundays to four Sundays and this became the accepted norm.

Advent begins on the Sunday nearest (whether before or after) to Nov. 30 (Saint Andrew’s Day).

“Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths” (Scripture sentence for Advent)

A Prayer That We Might Have a Pure Heart as We Wait for the Savior in Advent

Most gracious Lord, by whose direction this time is appointed to remind us of your infinite mercy to us in the incarnation of your only Son; grant that we may live in this holy time in the spirit of thanksgiving, and every day raise up our hearts to you, gratefully acknowledging what you have done for us.

Besides this, we ask your grace, O God, that we may make right use of this holy time, preparing our souls to receive Christ our Lord coming into the world at Christmas.

Christ came into the world to do good to all. Grant, O God, that we may thus prepare to meet him. Grant that we may be watchful at this time above all others, in avoiding everything that can be hurtful to our neighbor, whether in afflicting him, or offending him, or drawing him into sin, or casting any blemish on his reputation; but in all things, O God, may we follow the spirit of love, being quick to bring comfort and relief to all, as far as their circumstances require and ours permit.

Grant, O Lord, that thus we may prepare to meet our Redeemer.

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

*He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,*

*seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,*

taken up in glory.

(1 Tim. 3:16)

First Sunday in Advent (Advent 1)

(This year Nov. 27; the readings for this year are Isaiah 64:1-9; Ps. 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Cor. 1:3-9; Mk. 13:24-37)

In Advent we meditate on the mystery of God coming into a human life in Bethlehem and also await his second coming to complete our salvation and the redemption of the world. This looking to Christ in his two comings to us is set forth in the collect for Advent 1, which introduces the season of Advent:

“Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came among us in great humility; that on the last day, when he comes again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.”

The idea here is that we cannot celebrate Jesus’ first coming rightly unless we are already preparing for his second coming. For this reason, this prayer for Advent 1 is said every day during Advent to remind us that at Jesus’ second coming we will have the one we hoped for and will receive eternal life with him. Cf. Rom. 13:8: “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

Some other ancient prayers sometimes said on this Sunday are these:

“Make us we beseech you, O Lord our God, watchful and alert in waiting for the coming of your Son Christ our Lord; that when he comes and knocks, he will not find us sleeping in sin, but awake and rejoicing in his praises; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“We beseech you to purify our consciences by your daily visitation, that when your Son our Lord comes, he may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“May the Lamb of God, who once came to take away the sins of the world, take away from us every stain of sin. Amen.

And may he who came to redeem what was lost, at his second coming not cast away what he has redeemed. Amen.

That, when he comes, we may have perpetual joy with him on whom we have believed. Amen.”

Second Sunday in Advent (Advent 2)

(This year Dec. 4; the readings for this year are Isaiah 40:1-11, Ps. 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Pet. 3:8-15a; Mk. 1:1-8)

The purpose of Advent is to direct us toward the promises in Scripture concerning the coming of Jesus.

We are reminded of this in the prayer for Advent 2:

“Blessed Lord, you have caused all holy scriptures to be written for our instruction: grant us so to hear them, read, mark learn, and inwardly digest them, that, encouraged and supported by your holy Word, we may embrace and always hold fast the joyful hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

The promises of Scripture find their fulfillment in Jesus and invite us to hope in him and in the Father (who promised and sent Jesus to be our savior). Cf. Rom. 15:13: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
You do faithfully fulfill your promises.
We thank you that you did send your only begotten Son
in the fullness of time.
With all your church we celebrate his joyful coming.*

*We glorify you, our gracious Father,
and your Son, our King from Zion,
and the Holy Spirit.*

*You, our King, who came in the name of your Father, we beg you
enable us to celebrate your holy advent
in our hearts, with our words, and through our devoted lives.
Pour out your bountiful blessing upon us.
Enable us to listen to your Word with eagerness,
to trust it and accept it in faith,
so that we may have joy in the Holy Spirit and offer you our adoration.*

*Let us serve you, the Incarnate God, our Redeemer,
in all this time here in your Church now,
and then in your Kingdom forever.
Amen.*

Third Sunday in Advent (Advent 3): Prayer for the Pastors and Teachers in the Church

(This year Dec. 11; the readings for this year are Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11; Ps. 126; Lk. 1:46b-55; 1 Thess. 5:16-24; Jn. 1:6-8,19-28)

The prayer for this Sunday reminds us that just as Jesus sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for him (Mal 3:1; Mt. 11:10), so today Jesus sends teachers and pastors to call people to himself:

“Lord Jesus Christ, at your first coming you sent your messenger to prepare the way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise make ready your way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever. Amen.”

Jesus, who is the giver of all good gifts, began this work of announcing the coming of salvation: Lk. 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”

Mt. 20:28: “Jesus said: The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has called specific believers to continue this work of teaching about salvation in Christ and caring for all his people, as we await his second coming: Acts 20:28: “Saint Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus: Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord, which he obtained with his own blood.”

1 Cor. 4:1: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (The “mysteries” here are the truths of the Gospel which were once hidden and now revealed [Eph. 1:9].

There are two further prayers that are said for pastors on this Sunday:

“Almighty God who has committed to human hands the ministry of reconciliation: We humbly ask you, by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, to put it into the hearts of many to offer themselves for this ministry, that by this ministry people may be drawn into your blessed kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“Almighty God our heavenly Father, who has purchased for yourself a universal Church by the precious blood of your dear Son; Mercifully look upon your Church and so guide and govern the minds of your servants, the overseers and shepherds of your flock, that they may lay hands suddenly on no one, but faithfully and wisely choose persons fit to serve in the ministry of your Church. And to those who shall be ordained to any holy function, give your grace and heavenly blessing; that both by their life and their teaching they may set forth your glory and advance the salvation of all people; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

A prayer is then said for all people who are gripped by any kind of sin or spiritual bondage, that Jesus would come to them and forgive and heal them:

“God, whose property it is always to show mercy and to spare, hear our prayers, and in your compassion forgive those whom the chain of trespass binds.”

Tit. 3:3-8: “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Fourth Sunday in Advent (Advent 4)

(This year Dec. 18; the readings for this year are 2 Sam. 7:1-11,16; Ps. 89:1-4,19-26; Rom. 16:25-27; Lk. 1:26-38)

In the previous week we had prayed for Jesus to come to his Church and to raise up pastors to teach and care for his Church.

This week we pray that Jesus would come to each of us in the Church to help us and heal the particular patterns of sin that have weighed us down the most (our "predominant fault"):

"Raise up our great power, Lord, and come among us to save us, that, although through our sins we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your plentiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the sufficiency of your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen."

Since our greatest sin is often our inability to trust God, to believe that he will really care for us as he promises, we are invited to look at Mary's response when the angel tells her she will give birth to the Son of God. In the conversation, Mary starts with a very cautious reserve ("How will this be, since I am a virgin?") but later finds herself able to trust God ("I am the servant of the Lord; let it be for me as you have said").

Phil. 4:5-7: "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Jn. 14:18: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

Mt. 28:20: "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Man has to believe others in matters that he cannot know perfectly by himself. Now no one is to be believed so much as God is...

There is only one nobility, to do the will of God. Therefore it is said, "Whoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."

(Thomas Aquinas)

*May the most just, most lovable,
and the most high Will of God be done,
be fulfilled, be praised and exalted
in all things forever.
Amen.*