

The Church teaches that Advent is a significant liturgical season dedicated to preparation for the celebration of Christmas, which commemorates the first coming of Jesus Christ. It is a time characterized by devotion, penance, and anticipation of both the historical and future comings of Christ.

Key Teachings on Advent:

1. Meaning and Purpose:

- Advent, derived from the Latin word *adventus*, means "coming." It is a time set aside by the Church to prepare for the worthy celebration of the mercies of our Lord's first coming and to prepare for His second coming (V3 Challoner The Catholick Christian Instructed 1737 290:2).
- The spirit of Advent encompasses penance, holy longing, and sanctified hope, as the faithful prepare their souls for the grace to receive Christ worthily and look forward to eternal communion with Him (V0 Schneider Credo 2023 355:2).

2. Duration and Structure:

- Advent lasts for four weeks, beginning with the Sunday nearest to the feast of St. Andrew (November 30), and includes four Sundays leading up to Christmas (V0 Schneider Credo 2023 355:1; V15 Signay An Abridgment of the Quebec Catechism 1834 127:2).
- Each of the four Sundays has specific themes and readings that progressively prepare the faithful for the coming of Christ (V2 Turberville An Abridgment of the Christian Doctrine 1649 316:1).

3. Liturgical Practices:

- The liturgical color for Advent is purple, symbolizing penance and preparation (V19 German Bishops A Catholic Catechism 1958 268:2).
- During Advent, the Church emphasizes prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as means to prepare for the celebration of Christmas (V13 Jean-Joseph Gaume The Catechism of Perseverance vol IV 1884 168:1).
- The *Gloria in excelsis* is omitted at Mass, and the faithful are reminded of the need for repentance and prayer (V13 Jean-Joseph Gaume The Catechism of Perseverance vol IV 1884 164:1).

4. Historical Context:

- The observance of Advent has ancient roots, with early practices including a longer period of fasting similar to Lent. Over time, the duration was standardized to four weeks (V13 Jean-Joseph Gaume The Catechism of Perseverance vol IV 1884 163:2).
- The Church historically encouraged the faithful to engage in acts of penance and devotion during this time, reflecting on the significance of Christ's coming (V13 Jean-Joseph Gaume The Catechism of Perseverance vol IV 1884 167:1).

5. Spiritual Preparation:

- The Church calls on the faithful to prepare their hearts for the coming of Christ through confession, fasting, and good works, emphasizing the importance of spiritual readiness (V13 Jean-Joseph Gaume The Catechism of Perseverance vol IV 1884 168:2).
- The *O antiphons*, sung during the last days of Advent, express the longing for the Messiah and highlight His various attributes and roles (V13 Jean-Joseph Gaume The Catechism of Perseverance vol IV 1884 166:1).

6. Prohibition of Marriage:

- The Church forbids the solemnization of marriage during Advent, as this time is particularly set apart for prayer and penance (V5 Donlevy The Catechism, or Christian Doctrine, By Way of Question and Answer 1742 74:4; V14 Deharbe Complete Catechism 1882 449:3).

Conclusion:

Advent is a profound season of preparation that invites the faithful to reflect on the significance of Christ's coming, both in history and in the future. It is a time for spiritual renewal, marked by prayer, penance, and a deep longing for the Savior.

6 Ways to Keep Your Advent Holy by Elizabeth Ficocelli

Timely tips to keep you and your family on track liturgically.

In the words of the popular Christmas song, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year . . .” But for many of us, the weeks leading up to Christmas can also be the busiest, most stressful and downright challenging time of year for our family to grow in holiness.

With all the demands of the season — the shopping, the shipping, the baking, the decorating, the entertaining — it’s all too easy to take our eyes off Jesus, the reason for the season.

So, how can we make *this* Advent any different?

First things first. Give Jesus the first place by scheduling on the calendar a few simple but poignant activities to remind you and your family what this season is all about, and then schedule the rest of the celebratory rituals.

Having raised four boys, I’m all about solutions that are simple, attainable and easy to remember. That’s how I developed my six ways to keep the Advent season holy: by using the six letters of Advent to keep me and my family on track each year:

A is for Adoration. The Three Wise Men were the very first adorers of Jesus, traveling from afar to worship the Newborn King as he lay in the manger. We do not have to travel far at all to imitate this gesture. We can adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament at our own local parish, where he waits patiently for our visit. Sometime before Christmas, make a date with Jesus. Choose one hour, at your convenience, when it’s just you, your family and him. Simply rest in his presence before the tabernacle and soak in how much he loves you and wants to be with you.

D is for Divine Word. Give your family a 10-minute break each day of Advent. Carve out those precious minutes when it works best for your family — at dinnertime, at bedtime or in the evening before watching a Christmas movie. Curl up with the greatest book of all: the Bible. Read a small portion of the Gospels, and let the words enter your hearts and minds. What are God’s love letters trying to say in a special way to your family today? Ask each of your children to share their thoughts.

V is for the Virgin Mary. We all need companions for the journey. No one is meant to go through this life alone. The Blessed Mother is the perfect Advent companion when we allow her to wrap our family in her mantle of protection, model the virtues for us, and intercede for all our needs. There are two special Marian feast days that occur every December: the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 8 and the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12. Make plans to attend these Masses, if possible, as a family. Make the days extra special with a party for Mother Mary, a family Rosary or a Mexican-themed dinner.

E is for Examination of Conscience. With the Holy Spirit’s assistance, reflect on where you need to make straight your ways for the coming of the Lord. Invite the whole family to do the same. Then treat yourselves to the ultimate unburdening: the sacrament of reconciliation, or confession. Feel lightened, relieved, refreshed and, most of all, joyful to receive the beauty of the season. There is no better way than confession to prepare our hearts for Jesus’ coming. Go as a family to receive this sacrament and then go out afterward for ice cream or to see holiday lights. Christ’s forgiveness is truly cause for celebration.

N is for Neighborliness. What better gift to give Jesus for his birthday than a little extra TLC for our neighbors, particularly the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the lonely and the marginalized. December is chock-full of opportunities to donate gifts to less fortunate families, work at a soup kitchen, or visit a shut-in, bringing with you

some fellowship and cheer. It presents a great teaching moment for your family to learn about the works of mercy: Choose one of them that your family can do together, extending Christian charity as a domestic church.

T is for Traditions. Give your family a daily reminder of the sacredness and holiness of Advent by incorporating some special family traditions in your home. There are lots of them to choose from: the Advent Wreath, the Jesse Tree, the Advent calendar and decorating the house with purple, just to name a few. It's a great way for your family to stay bonded and grounded, while at the same time building anticipation and excitement for the Incarnation of the Lord.

And the last tip: The best way to protect and enhance your family's Advent is to plan early and have reasonable expectations. Gather the family together (Thanksgiving weekend is a great time to do this) and talk about the upcoming Advent season. Come up with a family plan of action to honor and celebrate this unique liturgical season. Put those ideas on the calendar immediately, so you are well prepared and your well-intentioned plans do not come to disappointing results.

May your family have a blessed and meaningful Advent!

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Ten ways to get the most out of Advent by Zoey Maraist

The church calls Advent a period of “devout and expectant delight.” Here are a few ways to enter into the season that prepares us for Christmas.

- Embrace penance

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops describes Advent as a time of preparation. “Our Advent readings call us to be alert and ready, not weighted down and distracted by the cares of this world. Advent also includes an element of penance in the sense of preparing, quieting and disciplining our hearts for the full joy of Christmas.”

Start by going to confession during Advent. Consider giving up something or making small sacrifices. Maybe hold off on holiday sweets until after Christmas or give up meat on certain days. Walk or use public transportation. Turn off the radio or listen to Christian music.

- Celebrate the feasts of the season

Several feasts fall within the season of Advent, such as the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe Dec. 12 and St. Lucy Dec. 13. The Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, is a holy day of obligation. On the eve of St. Nicholas Day, Dec. 6, many children leave out their shoes for St. Nick to fill with treats. Learn more about the saints, attend daily Mass on their feast days or see if your parish is holding any special events in their honor.

- Shop at a parish craft sale

Many parishes are hosting craft sales, such as St. John Neumann Church in Reston, which is hosting a [Christmas Bazaar](#) with fair trade goods Nov. 26-27. St. Rita Church in Alexandria is hosting a St. Nicholas Market Dec. 4. Check out your parish bulletin or the events section of the Catholic Herald for more festivities.

- Attend a special liturgy, concert or party

The Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Arlington has a [Country Christmas](#) event Dec. 10. Holy Trinity Church in Gainesville has a live [Bethlehem Walk](#) Dec. 21-22. Visit Pauline Books and Media in Alexandria Dec. 10 for their annual Baby Jesus birthday party and manger photo op. Check out your parish bulletin or the events section of the Catholic Herald for more festivities.

- Decorate with religious décor

Before you deck the halls with boughs of holly, pull out your Advent calendar, creche and Advent wreath. Having beautiful reminders of the reason for the season helps keep the spiritual side at the forefront.

- Wear pink for Gaudete

On Gaudete Sunday — the third Sunday of Advent, this year Dec. 11 — the pink candle on the Advent wreath is lit and priests wear rose vestments instead of purple. “Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday of rejoicing, because the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent, when their preparation is now half over,” notes the USCCB. Get in the spirit by throwing on a pink dress or tie.

- Support local Catholic gift stores

Looking for religious books, rosaries or saint-themed apparel? If you’re looking for Christmas gifts, check out your local parish gift shop, [Paschal Lamb Books and Gifts](#) in Fairfax or the [Catholic All Year Market](#) in Marshall.

- Perform a corporal work of mercy

Christmas is a time of giving, so make sure to give to the less fortunate. Check your parish bulletin to see if there’s a food drive or toy collection you can support. Donate to your favorite charity, or bring baked goods to a homebound neighbor or relative.

- Learn about another culture’s traditions

Find out more about the customs of another country by attending their Advent celebrations at diocesan parishes. For example, posadas are celebrated in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and other Latin American countries. “Neighborhoods get together to reenact the pilgrimage of Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus. They go from house to house singing traditional Advent and Christmas carols or villancicos, knocking on every door until they find one house that gives them shelter,” according to the USCCB.

Many Filipinos participate in [Simbang Gabi](#), a novena of Masses leading up to Christmas, occasionally with Filipino food after Mass.

- Make a pilgrimage

Just as Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus, you can make a trip of your own. Visit a local church you haven’t been to before, or one named in honor of a member of the Holy Family, such as the Basilica of St. Mary in Alexandria. Or travel to Washington to see the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Franciscan Monastery or the St. John Paul II National Shrine.

During this busy season, carve out some time for a few of these faith-filled activities to make this Advent your best yet.