



SAINT PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH FORT BENTON

NEWSLETTER

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THE MEANING OF THE SEASON OF ADVENT: AN EPISCOPAL REFLECTION

For members of the Episcopal Church, the season of Advent is one of the most cherished and meaningful times in the liturgical calendar. It marks the beginning of a new church year and invites us to a time of anticipation, preparation, and reflection. But what does Advent truly mean, and how do Episcopalians observe this sacred season? Let's take a closer look at the history, symbolism, and practices of Advent within the Episcopal tradition, as well as its spiritual significance for today's world.

WHAT IS ADVENT?

In the Episcopal Church, Advent is the season that spans the four Sundays before Christmas. It is a time of preparation not only for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas but also for the anticipation of Christ's second coming. The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival." This dual sense of "coming" is what makes Advent unique: it is a time to reflect both on Christ's incarnation 2,000 years ago and on the future fulfillment of God's kingdom.

While the commercial world might focus on Christmas shopping and festive parties, Advent in the Episcopal Church is more about spiritual readiness. It's a time to reflect on our lives, examine our hearts, and renew our faith, even as we prepare to celebrate the joyous birth of Christ.

THE HISTORY OF ADVENT IN THE EPISCOPAL TRADITION

Advent's roots trace back to early Christianity. By the 4th and 5th centuries, Western churches had begun observing a season of preparation before Christmas, although its length and focus varied. Initially, Advent was more penitential, with fasting and prayer as

central themes, much like Lent. Over the centuries, the tone shifted toward joyful anticipation, while still maintaining an element of quiet reflection.

In the Anglican and Episcopal tradition, Advent has retained this balance between solemn reflection and joyful expectation. Today, it is a season that invites both penitence and hope, as Episcopalians prepare for the coming of Christ in a deeply spiritual way.

THE ADVENT WREATH AND ITS SYMBOLISM

One of the most beloved symbols of Advent in the Episcopal Church is the Advent wreath, which features four candles placed on a circular wreath made of evergreen branches. Each candle represents one of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, with a new candle being lit each week.

The wreath itself carries rich symbolism. The circle of the wreath represents eternity, a reminder of God's unending love and the everlasting life we are promised through Christ. The evergreen branches symbolize renewal and the continuation of life, even in the midst of winter.

Each candle has its own significance:

The First Candle: The Candle of Hope

The first candle is often referred to as the Prophecy Candle and represents the hope of the coming Messiah. This candle reminds Episcopalians of the ancient prophecies that foretold Christ's birth and encourages them to reflect on their own hopes and longings for God's kingdom.

The Second Candle: The Candle of Peace

The second candle, called the Bethlehem Candle, symbolizes peace and reminds us of the peaceful preparation for Christ's birth. It points to the quiet humility of the Christ Child born in a stable and invites us to seek peace in our hearts and communities.

The Third Candle: The Candle of Joy

The third candle is unique because it is often pink, symbolizing a break in the somber tone of Advent. Known as the Gaudete candle (from the Latin word for "rejoice"), it represents joy and reminds us of the shepherds who heard the joyous news of Christ's birth. On this Sunday, Episcopalians rejoice in the nearness of Christmas and the joy that Christ brings.

The Fourth Candle: The Candle of Love

The fourth candle is the Angel Candle, symbolizing the message of love and good news that the angels proclaimed. It reminds us that Christ's coming is an act of divine love, and it invites us to share that love with others as we prepare for Christmas.

In some Episcopal churches, a fifth candle, the Christ Candle, is placed in the center of the wreath and is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to symbolize the arrival of Jesus, the Light of the World.

THE SPIRITUAL THEMES OF ADVENT

The Episcopal Church's observance of Advent revolves around four central themes: hope, peace, joy, and love. These are not just abstract concepts, but deeply spiritual ideas that shape our worship, prayer, and preparation during this sacred season.

Hope: Advent is a season of hope, reminding us of the promises God made to Israel and to the world through the prophets. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, we are also reminded to place our hope in Christ's future return. It is a season of both remembrance and expectation, where we cling to the hope that God's kingdom will come in fullness.

Peace: Peace is a profound Advent theme. In a world that often feels divided and chaotic, Advent invites us to rest in the peace that Christ brings. It's a time to seek inner peace through prayer and reflection, while also working toward peace in our relationships and communities.

Joy: As we journey through Advent, the anticipation of Christ's birth fills us with joy. This joy is not merely the excitement of holiday celebrations, but a deep, spiritual joy that comes from knowing God's love for us. It's the joy of salvation, the joy of God coming to dwell among us.

Love: Advent culminates in the ultimate act of love—God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ. Love is at the heart of the season, reminding us that we are called to love as Christ loves. During Advent, Episcopalians are encouraged to embody that love through acts of kindness, generosity, and compassion.

ADVENT PRACTICES IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Episcopalians observe Advent in a variety of ways, both in their personal spiritual lives and in community worship. Some of the most common practices include:

Lighting the Advent Wreath: Whether in church or at home, the lighting of the Advent wreath is a central tradition. As each candle is lit, it serves as a visible reminder of the light that is coming into the world through Christ.

Special Prayers and Readings: During Advent, the Episcopal Church uses specific prayers, called collects, that reflect the themes of the season. Scripture readings from the prophets, the Gospels, and the writings of Paul are chosen to help the congregation focus on the coming of Christ.

Quiet Reflection and Meditation: Advent is a time for Episcopalians to step back from the busyness of life and engage in deeper reflection. Many set aside time for daily prayer or meditation, focusing on the hope, peace, joy, and love that are central to the season.

Outreach and Service: Advent is also a season for giving back. Episcopal congregations often engage in acts of service and outreach during this time, from supporting food drives to providing gifts for those in need. These acts of charity are seen as a way to embody the love of Christ and prepare our hearts for his coming.

CONCLUSION

For members of the Episcopal Church, Advent is far more than a prelude to Christmas—it is a sacred season of preparation, anticipation, and transformation. It is a time to reflect on the mystery of Christ’s incarnation, to ready ourselves for his return, and to live out the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love in our daily lives.

Through the lighting of the Advent wreath, special prayers, and acts of kindness, Episcopalians are invited to slow down, focus on the spiritual significance of the season, and prepare their hearts for the greatest gift of all: the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. As we journey through Advent, may we carry its messages with us, not only during this season but throughout the year.

In Christ’s Love,
Tim+

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

November 3,	Morning Prayer, 10 AM
November 10,	Holy Eucharist and Homily at 10 AM - Bible Study to follow service
November 17,	Morning Prayer 10 AM
November 24,	Holy Eucharist and Homily at 10 AM - Bible Study to follow service
December 1,	Morning Prayer, 10 AM
December 8,	Holy Eucharist and Homily at 10 AM - Bible Study to follow service
December 15,	Morning Prayer, 10 AM
December 22,	Holy Eucharist and Homily at 10 AM - Bible Study to follow service Bishop Marty will be visiting us this day
December 24	Christmas Eve Service
December 29,	Morning Prayer, 10 AM

Please check the *River Press* for details and possible changes of service times

PRAYER REQUESTS

For solace, comfort, and healing for Celeste, Cole, Ginger, Marcia, Shawn, Shirley, and Wyley.

STAINED GLASS WINDOW REPAIR PROJECT

We received a bid for \$81,424 to repair the large stained glass window behind the altar. The work would include removing the window and covering the opening with plywood sheeting, transporting the window to the repair facility in Minnesota, disassembling it, repairing and reassembling it, shipping it back to Fort Benton and installing it in the church, along with a new wooden frame. The vestry will be meeting soon to discuss the project.

FROM *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER*

A Song of Creation *Benedicite, omnia opera Domini*

I Invocation

O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O ye angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

II The Cosmic Order

O ye heavens, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye waters that be above the firmament, bless ye the Lord;

O all ye powers of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O ye sun and moon, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye stars of heaven, bless ye the Lord;
O ye showers and dew, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O ye winds of God, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye fire and heat, bless ye the Lord;
O ye winter and summer, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O ye dews and frosts, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye frost and cold, bless ye the Lord;
O ye ice and snow, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O ye nights and days, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye light and darkness, bless ye the Lord;
O ye lightnings and clouds, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

III The Earth and its Creatures

O let the earth bless the Lord; *
O ye mountains and hills, bless ye the Lord;
O all ye green things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O ye wells, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye seas and floods, bless ye the Lord;
O ye whales and all that move in the waters, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O all ye fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord; *
O all ye beasts and cattle, bless ye the Lord;
O ye children of men, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

IV The People of God

O ye people of God, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye priests of the Lord, bless ye the Lord;
O ye servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.

O ye spirits and souls of the righteous, bless ye the Lord; *
O ye holy and humble men of heart, bless ye the Lord.
Let us bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; *
praise him and magnify him for ever.