

Thoughts for an *Extraordinary* Advent

Name: The name “Advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means “a coming, an approach, an arrival.”

Themes: Preparation for the three *adventus* (this is also a plural form) of Christ:

- First Coming of Christ - Incarnation and Nativity
- Intermediate Coming of Christ - Into the soul by grace
- Second Coming of Christ - As Judge at the End of the World

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent is that of the Last Judgement as related in Luke (21:25-33). The other Three Sundays relate aspects of St. John the Baptist’s mission. The Annunciation and Visitation are related during the Ember Days¹ of Advent.



Length: Advent starts on the fourth Sunday before Christmas (which is always 25 December). The length of Advent varies depending on where Christmas falls in relation to the Sunday preceding it. When Christmas falls on the Monday immediately following the preceding Sunday, Advent is the shortest it can possibly be (three weeks long and one Sunday on which coincide the Fourth Sunday of Advent and the Vigil of Christmas). When Christmas falls on the Sunday following the preceding Sunday, Advent is as long as it can possibly be (four weeks long with the Vigil of Christmas on the Saturday of the fourth week).

Symbolism of the Length: The four Sundays of Advent with their weeks represent the 4,000 years² between the Fall and the Nativity of Christ.

Liturgical New Year: The First Sunday of Advent is the start of the Church’s Liturgical Year. Thus, it is a time to take stock over how we grew spiritually over the last year and to enter anew into the Church’s liturgical cycle for the sake of our sanctification.

Gloria?: The *Gloria* is not used in the Masses of Advent as the opening words are those which the Angels sang at Christ’s birth and it would not be fitting to sing them in the Masses of a season which has the preparation for the liturgical commemoration of His birth as one of its themes. It is, however, sung on feast days.

1. The Ember Days are four sets of three days (Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday) near the start of the natural seasons (winter, spring, summer, and fall) traditionally set aside by the Church as days of penance. This practice is to thank God for the blessings given in the past season and to ask His blessings for the upcoming one. Additionally, as the historical Roman practice was to have ordinations on the Ember Saturdays (which is still reflected in the Masses for the Ember Saturdays and the Ordination Rites), the Ember Days were also set aside to ask God’s blessing on those to be ordained.

2. It is 4,000 years according to the Vulgate (Latin) Old Testament and Hebrew Old Testament chronologies. It is 5,199 years according to the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) chronology, which is used in the Christmas Proclamation. It is a complicated situation and the Church allows liberty in this regard.

Alleluia?: The *Alleluia* is used to represent the joy of the Church which knows that the Messiah has already come into the world to save her and her children. She does not abandon this joy even while preparing for the liturgical commemoration of His first coming.



Liturgical Color: As Advent is a season of preparation, it is also, in accord with Christian tradition, a penitential season. It was historically viewed as a mini-Lent. As such, the liturgical color is violet. This color also: (1) reminds us of, and invites us to feel, the longing the Hebrews had for the coming of the Messiah, (2) is a sign of the penance/discipline necessary to make one's soul a more fitting abode for Christ, and (3) expresses the longing of the Church for the return of Christ from Heaven. However, on the Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday, the color rose may be worn to

express the joy of reaching the liturgical halfway point of this penitential season.

Organ and flowers?: The organ should only be played if necessary and the altar should not be decorated with flowers. This is to create an atmosphere proper to the season. However, on *Gaudete* Sunday, these restrictions are lifted.

Orations: Seen in one light, the Collects (the first prayer at Mass) for the Sundays of Advent, which are also the prayer for the daily Office, do not contain the name "Jesus" in order to remind us of His absence. Seen in another light, there are, during the course of Advent (Sundays and Ember Days), six (a number which represents creation) Collects and Mass-of-the-Catechumens Orations which address the Father and seven (a number which represents God's rest and also perfection) which address the Son. It is fitting that there are six addressed to the Father, to Whom is attributed the title of Creator, and seven addressed to the Son, Who is the One added to perfect creation and Whose redemptive mission opened the way for us to rest in the peace of God.

Proper Preface?: In the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal there is a proper preface for Advent which the celebrating Priest can use at his discretion. If it is not used, then the preface will be that of the Holy Trinity or the Common Preface.

O Antiphons: The *Magnificat* antiphons at Vespers for 17 to 23 December inclusive, the Greater Ferias of Advent, are known as the "Great Antiphons" or the "O Antiphons" (as they all start with "O"). Unlike throughout the year, these *Magnificat* antiphons are sung standing. Each antiphon invokes the Messiah under a different title: *Sapientia* (Wisdom), *Adonai* (Lord), *Radix Jesse* (Root of Jesse), *Clavis David* (Key of David), *Oriens* (Orient / Day-spring), *Rex Gentium* (King of the Nations / King of the Gentiles), and lastly *Emmanuel* (Emmanuel / God is with us). The first letter of each of these titles can be read as a backwards acrostic which spells, in Latin, "*Ero cras*," meaning "Tomorrow I will be [there]." These Antiphons are the basis of the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."