

Season of Advent - starting Sunday 1 December 2013!

Ideas, prayers and readings for the Season of Advent - the four Sundays before Christmas, starting on 1 December 2013.

The word "Advent" essentially means "coming" and "expecting".

A. During the Advent Season we in faith are looking forward to the day when the kingdom of Jesus will bring all distress to an end. And Jesus who promised to return to us says: "*Yes, I am coming soon.*" (Rev 22:20). It is a time for hope.

B. During this season we also remember that Jesus wants to come to our lives, here and now, through his Spirit's work in us, and through us come to a lost world in dire need of him. It is a time for peace with God and each other.

C. God became a man and was born as a baby on that first Christmas, to become our Redeemer and King! . It is a time to be filled with joy.

D. . God so much loved us that he sent his Son, that we may not perish but have eternal life. This love we share with our fellow believers and with the whole world. Ultimately Advent is a Season for love.

We remember during Advent that Jesus Christ promised to physically come to us again, to create a new heaven and earth in which we will live for all eternity! This expectation inspires us that the coming of the Lord brings hope, peace, joy and love to our lives, our churches and our world!

Central Message: God gave his Son

During the Advent Sundays, until Christmas day, we will remember that Christ took on our weak, human nature and became one of us. As the Apostle Paul puts it in 2 Cor 5: 21: *God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.*

This is what Christ did for us during that first Christmas day. In taking on "weak human flesh", he associated himself with our dilemma which is the result of our mistakes, disobedience and sin. He came to live the life that God requires and we cannot accomplish, and lived it perfectly, holy and without sin, in our place! The Son of God became our brother and will never leave nor forsake us.

During the Season of Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, we want to celebrate that when God gave the gift of salvation, he did not send new laws and rules through which to figure out how we can be saved. **No, he sent his Son to save us.**

The central Advent message always remains that (John 3:16) *God so much loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

Let's trust in the Son. Let's rejoice because he did everything we could not do, to save us! Let's pray that he will come again soon to dry all our tears and grant us peace. Let's wait with the same urgent love of the believers in the New Testament Church for the victorious and conquering return of Christ, our King.

The Advent Candles

The four Advent candles represent the four weeks of Advent. The progressive lighting of one more candle every Advent Sunday symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of his second coming to judge the living and the dead.

The lighting of candles during this Season signifies Christ, the Light of the world.

Each candle represents one of the Advent themes:

The first Sunday we light the candle of Hope,
Second Sunday the candle of Peace,
Third Sunday the candle of Joy
and the fourth Sunday the candle of Love.

Many congregations involve children and teens to each Sunday light the next candle, involving them not only in the exciting countdown to Christmas day, but instill the expectation of Christ coming into our lives, and Christ returning to us on the Day of the Lord.

Advent prayers when we light the Advent candles during the services each Sunday:

First Advent Sunday: *Gracious God, in the living of our busy daily lives, keep us ever ready, ever faithful and ever hopeful for the day of Christ's return. As we worship you, may this hope be born into our lives.*

Second Advent Sunday: *Loving God, while we patiently wait for Christ's return and for **your peace** to ultimately prevail, enable each of us to work for peaceful solutions to the various conflicts which abound in our lives and our world. As we worship you, may your peace be born into our lives.*

Third Advent Sunday: *Merciful God, while we patiently wait for Christ's coming again, may each of us **rejoice** in our salvation; and may that joy permeate all aspects of our lives and be freely shared with others. As we worship you, grant us your joy.*

Fourth Advent Sunday: *Gracious Creator, while we patiently wait for Christ's coming again, inspire us when we celebrate Christmas now soon to come, to marvel on the fact that **your love** for each of us knows no bounds. May this love now be mirrored in all aspects of our lives as we freely share it with others.*

Suggested Readings during Advent:

First Advent Sunday: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Second Advent Sunday: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Third Advent Sunday: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; Luke 1:47-55; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Fourth Advent Sunday: Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

The liturgical colour for Advent is purple, the royal colour, because we expect the coming of our King. In recent years blue became an alternative colour for Advent in some congregations, because purple also is the liturgical colour for Lent.

In family practice, the Advent candles are usually lit at home on Sundays at lunch or dinner time, after the blessing of the food. The same prayers as above and one of the readings can be part of this beautiful and edifying ancient Christian practice to follow at home.