

Advent: A Time of Hope

The First Sunday of Advent marks the new Liturgical Year, and the Church shifts into a new Lectionary Cycle for Sundays, with 2024-25 from Year C, the Gospel of St. Luke.

The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming” or “arrival.” Advent in the 4th and 5th centuries was a time of preparation for the baptism of new Christians. Christians would spend 40 days in prayer and fasting to prepare for the celebration that accompanied the baptism of new believers. Over time, advent was connected to the coming of Christ. Originally Christians used this term to reference Christ’s second coming, but by the Middle Ages, Advent was connected to Christ’s first coming that we celebrate at Christmas.

Today, the season of Advent in the Christian calendar anticipates the “coming of Christ” from three perspectives: His physical birth in Bethlehem, His presence in our lives today, and His promised return at the end of time. Thus, Advent is fundamentally about waiting. It is a season that honors the anticipation of Christ's arrival. Just as the people of Israel awaited the Messiah, we too are called to wait in hope and faith. This waiting is not passive; it is an active engagement with our faith, a time to prepare our hearts and lives for the Lord's coming.

On the first Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of **hope**, which symbolizes promises delivered through the prophets from God as well as the hope we have in Christ. We are invited to read, pray, and reflect on the hope God’s plan gives us (foretold by the prophets and fulfilled by the life and death of Christ), and we meditate on the promise of Christ’s coming return.

The readings today remind us of God's faithfulness. In Jeremiah (33:14-16), we hear the promise of a righteous branch from David, a reminder that God is always at work, fulfilling His promises. In the Gospel reading from Luke (21:25-28, 34-36), Jesus speaks of signs in the heavens and the distress of nations. He encourages us to be vigilant and to stand firm, for our redemption is drawing near. As we reflect on these readings, let us hold onto **hope**, knowing that God is with us in our waiting and our struggles.

Advent is a chance to focus our thoughts on the gift God has given us in his son Jesus who stepped down from Heaven and took the form of a man *so that we might believe*. Let us, therefore, reflect on our own lives and the world around us. Are we prepared to recognize Christ when He comes? Are we living in a way that reflects our readiness for His return? We are invited to make a return gift to Jesus—a gift of our lives, transformed and pleasing to Him. This can take many forms: acts of kindness, deepening our prayer life, or reaching out to those in need. Each small act of love and service is a way to prepare our hearts for Christ.

May we prepare our hearts to welcome Christ, not only at Christmas but in every moment of our lives. Let us be vigilant, living in a way that reflects our faith and readiness for His coming. Amen.

Fr. Bula