



Archbishop's Advent Message 2018

Advent, the season preparing us for Christmas, begins today. Two questions come to my mind.

Is it possible for you to prepare spiritually to celebrate Christmas in our hectic and consumeristic climate? Can you create some interior space to welcome the Christ-child or will your heart and mind be overfull like the inn at Bethlehem in the original Nativity of our Lord?

The word "Advent" has a Latin root that means "coming." The pre-Christmas season of Advent is a time of preparation to celebrate the first coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas: "the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1.14)

Soon, a joyful feast will mark the reality that heaven came to earth that first Christmas. Until then, some traditional practices can help you get ready to celebrate.

In the church at Mass during Advent, the priests and deacons wear purple vestments for three of the four Sundays. There are also three purple candles in the traditional Advent wreaths that decorate the sanctuaries of parish churches and many family tables. Purple is a penitential colour, expressing sorrow and contrition for sins. As beneficial today as it has been for centuries, Catholics have celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation (also known as Confession or the sacrament of penance) in the four weeks before Christmas.

In addition, parishes often engage a speaker to give an Advent Retreat to help parishioners anticipate Christmas. Daily reflections and readings from the Scriptures are available in print and online to focus your prayer direction at home on the meaning of the season.

Some families use Advent prayer booklets at dinnertime to guide their prayers as they light one of the candles of their Advent wreath.

Parents with little ones often purchase an Advent Calendar, on which the children can take turns opening a window each day to reveal a faith-enriching picture or message.

The Christmas nativity scene or crèche, promoted by Saint Francis of Assisi hundreds of years ago, is a popular devotion. Some cherished crèches have been in families for generations. One practice has the figures of the three Magi (or wise men) processing across the living room, each day moved a little closer to the stable and crib containing Christ!

These and other practices remind us of the miracle of Christmas: God so loved the world that He sent us His only Son, like us in every way but sin, to bring us back into the intimacy of God's loving embrace.

It is possible to get caught up in the round of parties, decorating the house, buying the perfect present, sending cards or ecards, and the general busyness of the weeks before December 25. Consequently, we can forget that for Christians, "Jesus is the reason for the season."

This Advent, I encourage you to adopt more attentively some traditional practices. It could be a little focused prayer on the meaning of Christmas, a few moments each day spent with the crèche, an Advent wreath on the dinner table with four candles and a moment of prayer, penitential preparation ending with the sacrament of reconciliation, or a special donation to support the poor in our community. You will be blessed if you make a little space in your crowded life to welcome the Christ-child into your heart and home.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

✠ Terrence Prendergast, S.J.
Archbishop of Ottawa