

Concerning the Service during Advent

Advent marks the beginning of the Church year. It is a season within which we contemplate the Reign or Commonwealth of Christ as we await his return at the end of time. It is also a season in which we remember God “taking on human flesh” and dwelling among us which Christians call the Nativity or Birth of Jesus. There are four Sundays, which mark the Advent Season. Each Sunday, the scriptures call us to focus on important themes and people. The church also calls us to wait, in joyful hope! In contrast to the hurriedness and commercialism of the “X-mas” Season, which begins in November and culminates on Christmas Day, as Christians, we are called to hallow time in a different rhythm. For Episcopal Christians, Advent ends on Christmas. Christmas is a season of 12 days which ends on the 6th of January, the Feast of the Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Three Magi.

Advent is a preparatory season. It is an opportunity for us to contemplate and remember. It is a time to ready ourselves as we celebrate the Birth of Jesus, the Christ, which we call the Feast and Season of Christmas. For some years, the church gave a rather penitential focus to Advent. However, with the revision of the Liturgy, Advent has become more a season of hope and expectation rather than just penitence.

The color for the season is deep blue, for hope, expectation and repentance. The Advent Wreath has become an important symbol used throughout the Season.

The Advent Wreath

The origins of the Advent wreath are to be found in the customs of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples who during the cold December darkness of Eastern Europe gathered wreaths of evergreen and lit fires as signs of hope in a coming spring and renewed light.

Early Christians continued these customs, and by the 16th century Catholics and Protestants alike used these symbols to celebrate their Advent hope in Christ, the everlasting Light. The custom gradually spread to other parts of the Christian world.

The liturgical color of deep blue symbolises hope, expectation and repentance, and so the candles of the Advent wreath are blue. The Third Sunday in Advent is Gaudete Sunday. **Gaudete** Sunday, or “Rejoicing Sunday” is the Advent equivalent of the Fourth Sunday in Lent, **Laetare** Sunday, when the introit is based on Isaiah 66:10, “Rejoice with Jerusalem”.

The white candle in the centre of the wreath is the Christ candle, and is lit on Christmas.

The circle of greenery in the Advent wreath is also highly symbolic: the circle representing eternity (as in wedding rings), and the greenery symbolising new life and our ever-growing and ever living faith.

We will begin the Service each Sunday with an Opening Acclamation taken from the Hebrew Scriptures focused on the “O” Antiphons which includes the lighting of the candle or candles on the Advent Wreath. The service continues then with saying or singing the Trisagion, an ancient text which affirms the divinity of God. As a way of focusing on the Scripture of the Day, the Presider will offer a Sentence of the Day which is followed by the Collect of the Day. We are then seated

for the Readings from Scripture. During Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, we will use an Affirmation of Faith based on the Athanasian Creed.

During the Liturgy of the Table, we will use Eucharistic Prayer B from the Book of Common Prayer 1979 and the Post Communion Prayer is found on Page 365 in the Book of Common Prayer...reminding us that we are living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ!

The Gospel texts for this year of the Revised Common Lectionary (Year B) are taken from three Gospels: Mark, John and Luke. **Advent 1** is from Mark 13 – encouraging us to KEEP AWAKE as because the Day of Christ return can come at any time; **Advent 2** is from Mark 1 – The opening verses of the Gospel; **Advent 3** is from John 1 – verses from the Prologue of John's Gospel describing the particular ministry of John the Baptist; **Advent 4** is from Luke 1 – the story of the angel Gabriel visiting Mary...declaring God's favor upon her...that she was chosen to be the Mother of God's son, Jesus!

The sources for the words used this season are many. Most come from the Book of Common Prayer 1979 and one of its supplements, Enriching Our Worship 1 (1997) and the Church of England's book Common Worship (2000).