

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT ADVENT



WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent is the season that begins the liturgical year. It consists of four Sundays starting with the Sunday closest to November 30th. The word "advent" is derived from the Latin *adventus*, which means "coming" or "arrival."

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S FOCUS DURING ADVENT?

The focus of the church during the Advent season is Christ's threefold coming - past, present, and future. First, we remember the Lord's humble first coming in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. This is what we celebrate on Christmas. Second, we give thanks for His present and continual coming into our hearts through the Word and Sacraments. Finally, we look forward with hope and patience to His victorious second coming as Judge and King at the end of time.

Advent is the first part of a larger liturgical season that includes Christmas and Epiphany and continues until the beginning of Lent. Viewed as a whole, this time celebrates God the Father's wonderful gift to the world of His only-begotten Son, sent to save us from sin and death.

WHAT IS THE LITURGICAL COLOR FOR ADVENT?

Purple is the traditional color for the season of Advent. Purple was the most costly dye in ancient times and was therefore used by kings to indicate their royal status. Purple also signifies the repentance and patience of God's people as they await the arrival of their Lord

WHAT IS AN ADVENT WREATH?

The Advent wreath is one of the most popular symbols used by Christians during the season of Advent. These wreaths, consisting of a circle of

evergreen branches set around four candles, are used in both churches and Christian homes. The evergreen circle stands for the eternal life that Christ has won for all believers. The burning candles represent the coming of Christ as the light of the world (see John 1:4-9). The colors of the Advent candles vary. Some churches use four blue candles to emphasize the hopeful anticipation of the season. Others follow an older custom of three purple candles and one pink or rose candle. The purple signifies that Advent is a season of repentance as well as expectation. A purple candle is lit on the first Sunday of Advent, with another one lit on each succeeding Sunday. The joyfully colored pink candle is reserved for the third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete*, which means "rejoice" in Latin, is the opening word of the traditional Introit for that Sunday: *Rejoice!... the Lord is near.* (Philippians 4:4). In addition to the four Advent candles, most Advent wreaths also have a larger, white candle in the center called the Christ candle. This candle is lit on Christmas Eve and throughout the Twelve Days of Christmas.

WHY IS ADVENT SUCH AN IMPORTANT SEASON IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH?

While the rest of secular society is already caught up in the frantic rush of shopping, decorations, parties, and other distractions, the church takes pause during Advent to contemplate the wonder of God's underserved mercy and love in Jesus Christ. Christians approach the Advent season much as expectant parents approach the months before a child is born. There are feelings of exhilaration, uneasiness, longing, and awe as the day of arrival approaches. Just as parents do everything they can to get ready and put things into good order, God's people prepare themselves at home and at church for the coming of the Lord by exercising the disciplines of Advent: confession and repentance, fervent prayer, immersion in Scripture, fasting, and the singing of seasonal hymns and anthems. Faith Lutheran like many congregations conducts special mid-week Advent worship services to give our members further opportunities to delight in God's plan of salvation and prepare their hearts for the coming of our Lord and Savior. The Christian's spirit of joyful anticipation and disciplined preparation is captured in the words of this Advent hymn:

*Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes,
The Savior promised long;
Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne
And ev'ry voice a song!*