

## Advent | an introduction

**I. When do we celebrate Advent?**

- The season of Advent lasts for four weeks leading up to Christmas and ends on December 24th.
- Advent starts on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. If Christmas happens to fall on a Sunday, then Christmas is the fourth Sunday of that quartet.
- Some people formally observe Advent only on the Sundays, but others celebrate it every day from the first Sunday through Christmas Eve.
- Of course, as we've mentioned many times on this show, God does require you to worship Him *every day of the year*. However, you are free to do so in whatever Christ-honoring way you believe will please Him as long as it's rooted in *biblical* Truth.
- That means that you don't have to technically celebrate Advent, and you don't have to celebrate it the way anyone else does. Now, I do believe that all Christians will — at one point or another — celebrate God's advents, but it may likely not fall during what we call the season of Advent.

**II. What does Advent mean?**

- The word "advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means arrival or coming.
- This year, we're going to be focusing on both Christ's first and second advent.
- The first coming of Christ happened around year AD 0, plus or minus five years. It was prophesied all throughout the Old Testament, and though the Jews spent thousands of years looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, Christians have spent thousands of years looking back to the coming of the Messiah.
- But we have a future coming to which to look forward, we have Christ's second coming . . . also prophesied all throughout the Bible.
- So, this year, Advent is a time of looking back and looking forward. Well, actually, looking forward, then looking back.

**III. How do people celebrate Advent?**

- **Something new is celebrated every week.**
  - While most Advent traditions involve focusing on a different element of Christ's coming, there are many ways of doing that.
  - For example, some focus on the elements of Christ's incarnation — the first Sunday they talk of the Prophets, the second Sunday they discuss the Angels, the third is about the Shepherds, and the fourth is about the Magi.
  - Others have themes like hope, peace, joy, and love. In fact, the themes of joy and love are incorporated into most traditions.
  - However, for The Celebration of God *this year*, we're going to take the first two weeks of Advent to look forward to Christ's second coming, and we're going to devote the second two weeks of Advent to looking back to His first coming. Another theme that is generally part of most non-commercialized Advent observations is the theme of desperation, repentance, fasting, and spiritual preparation.
  - Now, not everyone does this, but I believe a focus on repentance not only aids the beautiful movement and cooperation among The Celebration of God holidays, but also the much needed spiritual character trait of humility.

- In Matthew 5, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out the path to salvation. First, we all must first acknowledge that we are spiritually destitute. That realization should lead to a sense of grief due to our sin against a beautiful and perfect God. And that should produce in us true humility where we seek His mercy and grace because we are incapable of saving ourselves. Only then can we be truly born again.
- Of course, the Catholic ideas of flagellation and penance are not biblical, but they at least recognize that sin is a horrible and disgusting and wicked offense against a holy God that deserves just consequences.
- So, how would Bible-believing Christians strike the balance between arrogant ignorance of our sin and the arrogant belief that we should punish ourselves for our sin?
- Scripture must be our guide. And I think Psalm 51 is a beautiful illustration of the heart we must have when it comes to our sin.
- **Advent Calendars, Advent Wreaths, & Jesse Trees**
  - The whole point of Advent is to wait for and look forward to the coming Christ — not just the celebration of His past coming, but to genuinely long for His second coming.
  - The Calendar not only shows the slow progression of time as new doors are opened and new verses are unwrapped and new decorations are hung, but — when done well — the calendar unwraps Truth about God that will help us better know, love, and serve Him.
    - The idea is that you and/or your children, your students, your church members, your friends, or whoever, takes a minute or two from every day to open the contents, read the verse, and then spend a moment in prayer thanking the Lord, confessing sin, or praising Him. And then you get to enjoy the treat. And I do believe the treat is important because it symbolizes the sweetness of God and His Word. (Psalm 119:103)
  - Another very common aspect of the Advent season is the lighting of candles on each of the Sundays.
    - Most people will light a purple candle on the first Sunday. Some people refer to it as the “Prophecy Candle” that reminds us of the prophets (namely Isaiah) who prophesied about the coming Messiah. This candle is intended to represent hope or expectation.
    - On the second Sunday another purple candle is lit that some call the “Bethlehem Candle.” This is meant to represent love and even symbolize the manger.
    - The third candle is unique in that it’s pink. Historically, the first few weeks involved a lot of fasting and repentance and the like, so this third Sunday focuses on rejoicing. It’s been said that the change in color is to draw our attention to the joyous proclamation of this “Shepherd’s Candle.”
    - The fourth candle is also purple and is often called the “Angels’ Candle.” This one is said to represent peace.
    - And then many people add a fifth white candle called the “Christ Candle” that is lit on Christmas Eve. It obviously represents the incarnation of Christ — the pure Light Who has come into the world to save men.
  - The Jesse Tree is designed to tell the story of the Old Testament which culminates with Christ’s birth. (Isaiah 11:1)
    - One such tradition adds a new ornament to the tree every day of the Advent Season. These ornaments are designed to represent biblical characters and events, but it’s incredibly important that each be explained to our disciples so that they appreciate the sweeping narrative before them.

- Here are just some of the ornaments people have used: an apple to represent Adam and Eve, a rainbow to represent Noah, a ram to illustrate Abraham offering Jacob, a coat of many colors for Joseph, tablets for the 10 Commandments, a ram's horn for the fall of Jericho, grain to represent Ruth, a shepherd's crook for David, a shell to picture John the Baptist, a white lily for Mary, a hammer for Joseph, Jesus' human father, a manger, etc.

#### **IV. How can you prepare for Advent?**

- If we truly want to orient our minds to God, we must spend ample time in the Bible as well as speaking to God in prayer.
- Read through our suggested Bible Reading list, pray through the list.
- Dedicate time this season to acknowledging and repenting of your sin. Praise God for sending His Son the first time, and wait with bated breath for Christ to return.
- And don't forget to lead your community in this act of worship. The Celebration of God is not merely a personal discipleship experience; it's designed to be a corporate experience. God has people in your life He wants you to lead to Him and sharpen.
- And lastly, you can prepare for Advent by redecorating your Celebration Wall. Next time we're going to talk about the new winter Season of Grace, so this is the perfect time to refresh the wall and get it ready for a new focus.
- One thing I have not mentioned yet is how you can take your Celebration Wall and integrate the Advent Calendar, Jesse Tree — even the candles — onto it.

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