



What is Advent?

As Armenian Orthodox Christians, we begin the celebration of the Theophany, a time of preparation called Advent, which is 50 days before January 6. Advent is a time to begin to purify both our souls and bodies to enter properly into and partake of the great spiritual reality of Christ's coming. Although Advent was like Lent at one time, a period of fasting, in modern times it has taken the form of three week-long fasts during the 50 days in addition to the regular fasting days of Wednesdays and Fridays.

The three week-long fasts during Advent are:

1. The Fast of Advent (*Heesnagats Bahk*)
2. The Fast of Saint James of Nisibis (*Soorp Hagopah Bahk*)
3. The Fast of the Nativity (*Dznuntyan Bahk*)

Advent is a preparatory penitential season which is reflected in the life of the Church not with any specific liturgical worship services or special rites, but by a number of small preparatory liturgical hymns and prayers that gradually proclaim Christ's coming into the world as a man. The Church ultimately announces the birth of Christ, the incarnation of God, His entrance into the world for its salvation.

In the two weeks preceding Christmas, the Church commemorates the King and Prophet David as a sign of the messianic prophecies that the child of Christ would be born of the House of David and His kingship be made known. While the preeminent apostles Peter, Paul, James and John, Stephen, the first martyr, James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem and brother of our Lord, are symbols of the Lord's earthly ministry for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God as the fulfillment of all righteousness.

Finally, one week prior to Christmas, the Church prepares for the Nativity with a week-long strict fast called the Fast of the Nativity which marks the final preparation in anticipation of the birth of the Son of God. The joyful note of this season, in anticipation of the Birth of Christ, gives an opportunity to the faithful to exercise their Christian commitment in a mood of happy spiritual joy as St. John the Baptist says, "Make ready the way of the Lord" (Matthew 3:3). As we *make ready the way of the Lord*, let us heed the words of Christ from the Gospel reading of that day according to St. Luke who reminds us that in order to prepare for and receive the coming of the Lord, we must become like a child, in innocence, sincerity, simplicity, and humility.