



ADVENT

Though Advent appears at the end of the secular calendar year, it is the beginning of the Christian year. The deep darkness of the natural world around us is an echo of the nurturing darkness of the dawning of Creation. It is in this holy space we begin re-telling our Sacred Stories. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means "coming" or "arrival". Advent prepares us for, and leads us to, Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Churches are often decorated in sarum blue during Advent, a color that honors Mary the mother of Jesus - an outward sign of our hope and expectation as we await, with her, the coming of the Christ. Sometimes royal purple is used in Advent as well. Advent is a season of waiting, wondering, and faithfully living in the in-between time: the time between remembering God has already walked as one of us and God's full in-breaking, once again.

THE ADVENT INVITATION

"Every time I go into the darkness, I return with fistfuls of jewels"

— Barbara McAfee

The four Sundays in Advent invite us on a journey. As the days grow shorter each week, we are invited to draw closer and closer to the light of Christ. We are invited to open our hearts a little wider each week to God With Us. In her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor writes: "...new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark." Advent is an invitation for rest and growth before a new beginning. What will you discover as you are nurtured in the darkness this year?

READ

Luke 1:46-55 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

WONDER

The tradition of the Advent Wreath dates back to the Middle Ages. The four candles of the wreath symbolize the four weeks of Advent and our growing hope as we near the day of Christ's birth. There are many ways to create an Advent wreath using what you already have at home. It can be as simple as four candles on a plate. Some use a fifth candle in the middle of the wreath, representing the light of Christ. If you have birthday candles, tea lights, or electric candles, use those. If you feel inspired to decorate it further, you might gather greens, pinecones, or sticks from outside, or use other items that remind you of waiting, hope and the dawning of a new year. Each Sunday of Advent, light a candle on the wreath; first one, then two, three, and finally four. Hold silence. Name a hope. Say a prayer. Even if you don't create a wreath, you might honor silence and prayer each Sunday. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Eve, welcoming and celebrating the light of Christ.

PRAY

God of grace, your eternal Word took flesh among us when Mary placed her life at the service of your will. Prepare our hearts for his coming again; keep us steadfast in hope and faithful in service, that we may receive the coming of his kingdom for the sake of Jesus Christ, the ruler of all, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Book of Common Worship, Westminster John Knox Press, 2018, p. 179.

FOR MORE ON ADVENT:

- *The Night of Las Posadas* by Tomie DePaola, Puffin Books, 2001. (Picture book)
- *Waiting Is Not Easy* by Mo Willems, Hyperion Books for Children, 2014. (Picture book)
- *Advent in Narnia: Reflections for the Season* by Heidi Haverkamp, Westminster John Knox Press, 2018, p. 179. (Teen and older)
- *The Womb of Advent*, by Mark Bozzuti-Jones, Church Publishing, 2007. (Adult)