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*And Mary said,
"Behold, I am the
handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me
according to your word."
And the angel
departed from her.
Luke 1:38*

Come, Lord Jesus!

The word Advent means "coming". As we begin the Liturgical Year the Church invites us to prepare our hearts for the birth of our Savior, Jesus but even beyond that to prepare for the final coming of Jesus at the end of time. *"Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come."* Mark 13:33

Let us each approach this Advent Season with a sense of hospitality. Why hospitality?? Because as Scott Hahn reminds us. . . Hospitality is the essence of the Kingdom! Hospitality is opening our hearts to receive guests. Let us prepare our hearts and homes to receive the most gracious guest of all – Our Lord Jesus Christ! Mary is our perfect model of hospitality . . . she humbly and quietly opened her entire life to the Son of God. Welcoming Jesus did not require a grand home or fine riches but only a pure, loving, obedient heart.

Are our hearts ready to receive Jesus as our guest – not just for a season but each day? Do we have clutter we need to clean out? Is there room for Him in our busy lives? Have we invited Jesus in? Do we remember to speak to Him and to listen to Him as an honored guest? Is Jesus treated as the center of attention in your heart and home?

The Church invites us to make ready our hearts and homes and in her goodness helps us to do just that. The Church in her wisdom helps us to prepare and to keep our eyes fixed on eternity – to live and prepare for eternity daily through the Liturgical Calendar. Each year we are invited to travel through Salvation History – living out the promises and providence of God through the Sacraments, daily Mass Readings, The Liturgy of the Hours, Celebrations and Memorials. These are more than remembrances – We are in a mysterious way invited to enter into all the events from the beginning of creation.

Time is sacred!

Let us enter into God's time fully by participating fully in the life of the Church!

The Liturgical Year

The more we participate in the life of Christ by celebrating the church year the closer we become to Him.

The Church's seasons and feasts help us not only to remember God's plan for us and but to actually take part in His plan of Salvation. In the course of one year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ. By celebrating each season the Lord's powers are made present in each age. Each year is a time for us to receive grace as we celebrate our life in Christ. **Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time** are the seasons of the Church's year.

The **Season of Advent** begins the Liturgical Year. Advent begins on the last Sunday in November or the first Sunday in December and lasts about four weeks. Advent is the time we prepare for Christ's coming among us.

The **Christmas Season** begins with the midnight Mass and celebrates the birth of Jesus. We rejoice and give thanks to God throughout the Christmas Season. The great **Feast of the Epiphany** celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the three wise men. Celebrated around January 6th this feast reminds us that God came among us for the entire human family and that He is the Light of the World.

Ordinary Time is the longest part of the Church's year beginning after the Epiphany until the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday. The Church follows a three-year cycle in reading the Gospel accounts. By listening to the four accounts of the Gospel over a three year period we become like the disciples traveling and learning with Jesus.

Ordinary Time begins after the Epiphany until the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday

The **Lenten Season** lasts approximately forty days (not including Sundays) before Easter. The Lenten Season is a call to change our hearts, repent and renew our commitment to live our baptismal call.

The **Easter Season** which begins with the **Triduum** or "three days" of celebration that begin on Holy Thursday evening continuing on Good Friday and ending with the celebrations of the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday celebrations. The Easter season lasts fifty days in which we celebrate **Pentecost** the "Birth" day of the Church.

Live Advent fully . . .

then celebrate Christmas

There are many ways we can prepare our hearts and homes to receive Jesus in the upcoming Christmas season. Traditions that draw us into the life of the Church and closer to Christ are important.

- Light an Advent wreath and follow the daily prayers
- Make more time for prayer
- Attend daily Mass if possible
- Fast - fasting is not just for Lent! Fasting helps to rid our hearts of the things that keep us from accepting Christ fully. We want our hearts to be completely free to accept our Savior!
- Decorate your home simply for Advent - then more elaborately for Christmas! Start simply then and add as the Christmas season gets closer! Remember the Christmas Season lasts until Jan 6th, the Epiphany!
- Reach out in charity and hospitality
- Go to Confession
- Look at your calendars and to-do lists and evaluate what activities and traditions draw you closer to Christ? Which draw you away? What can you drop or add to your Advent season to make it more fruitful?

Advent is not a time of consumerism and celebration but of spiritual growth!

For practical suggestions, traditions and prayers for living Advent fully please visit the following websites:

www.catholicculture.org
www.domestic-church.com