



## Advent Practices and Opportunities

Advent (ad-venio in Latin, or "to come to") – the four Sundays and the weekdays preceding Dec. 25 – is a period to slow down and ponder the incarnation of God. The period is set aside to both remember Christ's first coming as a babe in Bethlehem and remind ourselves that we are awaiting His return.

**Lighting an Advent wreath** is a time-honored custom in the Church. The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of his second coming. According to lore, the wreath has its roots in a Germanic tradition of placing lit candles amidst a wheel of evergreen – signifying the triumph of light and life over dark December days.

- Evergreens symbolize the vibrancy of life.
- The circular nature of the wreath represents the eternity of God.
- Four candles signify the four weeks of Advent.
- The purple candles represent the penance and prayer required to prepare for Christmas.
- The rose candle is lit on Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, which is a day of rejoicing because it marks the halfway point to Christmas.
- The light represents Christ, the light of the world.

*Source: Catholic Education Resource Center*

**Sponsor a disadvantaged family:** Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston seeks Angel Sponsors to assist with its "Share Your Blessings" program by providing items such as clothing, blankets and toiletries for disadvantaged families and toys for the children of these families. More than 3,000 were served through this program last Christmas. Visit [Catholic Charities' website](#) or call 713.874.6727.

**Countdown to Christmas:** Using an Advent calendar – a special calendar with "windows" that can be opened for the 24 days before Christmas – is another way to mentally gear up for Dec. 25. By patiently opening the windows one day at a time, you build up to Christmas as a joyous feast. Visit <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/advent/> to click through an electronic Advent calendar.

**Help others:** Advent is an opportune period to offer service to friends, neighbors and strangers as a recognition of Christ's coming to us through our brothers and sisters. Contact [Catholic Charities](#), [San Jose Clinic](#), or your local chapter of the [Society of St. Vincent de Paul](#) for Archdiocesan opportunities to help those in need this season.



**Show and tell your spiritual genealogy:** Decorating a Jesse Tree is another popular Advent tradition. Each day of Advent, an ornament representing key persons in salvation history leading to the birth of Christ are placed on a tree and Scripture verses pertaining to each person are read. The symbolic ornaments are traditionally handmade, and those placed on the Jesse Tree starting Dec. 17 represent the "O Antiphons" of Advent. The popular hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is a compilation of these seven prayers set to music.

**Don't forget:** the celebrations keep going after Dec. 25. Although the world may quickly tire of carols and lights after Dec. 25, the Church has only begun to celebrate the great mystery of God with us – Emmanuel. The days after Christmas offer a chance to relish the feasts of St. Stephen, the Holy Innocents, the Holy Family, the Solemnity of Mary, Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord. Spending time with the Scriptures from Advent until the end of the Christmas season calls us to set our hearts on the things that really matter, the things that really last.

For information on Advent or other suggestions of ways to celebrate the season, visit <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/advent/>. Keep visiting this web page throughout the Advent season for more information on local opportunities to serve during Advent.