A GUIDE TO... *Advent*

WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent comes from the Latin word '**adventus**' and means '**coming**'. It is the period of preparation in the church that is marked by the four Sundays before Christmas day. The first Sunday of advent can fall anywhere between 27th November and 3rd December.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF ADVENT?

Advent is time for us to prepare for the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Although he was born over 2000 years ago, we wait and prepare alongside Mary and Joseph as if he was coming to us for the first time. This is because as Catholics we believe that Jesus will return to us again one day and we want to be prepared for when this happens.

ADVENT / CHRISTMAS - WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Technically Christmas begins with 'Midnight Mass' on Christmas morning and lasts for 12 days after this. Advent is the season from 1st December until 24th December. Advent is the preparation and Christmas is the celebration that comes after this.

WHAT IS THE LITURGICAL COLOUR OF ADVENT AND WHY?

The liturgical colour for this season is purple/violet which is the colour of preparation and humility. For this reason, the priests' vestments are purple as are three of the Advent candles. On the third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete (joy) Sunday, the priests wear pink/rose instead and this matches the third Advent candle.

WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACH ABOUT ADVENT?

'When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "He must increase, but I must decrease."'(CCC 524)

In other words, the faithful (Catholics) are encouraged to reflect back and celebrate the anniversary of the Lord's first coming into the world. We ponder at the great mystery of the Incarnation when Our Lord, taking on human form, entered our time and space to free us from sin. We also recall in the Creed (a confession of faith spoken aloud during mass) that our Lord will 'come again to judge the living and the dead' and that we must be ready to meet him.

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WHAT DO CATHOLICS DO DURING ADVENT?

We all celebrate Christmas before Christmas day but think of ways that you might be able to delay this a little in your home. Perhaps the Christmas tree can wait a couple more days, maybe the Christmas sweets will remain in the cupboard a little longer. One tradition is to put up the crib scene at home a little at a time during Advent, leaving the manger empty until Christmas day.

ADVENT CALENDARS

A much loved tradition! We all love the chocolate ones but perhaps beside this you may have another way of counting down to Christmas – what about a small act of kindness each day or a small line of scripture, a prayer or a small act of fasting (going without something). Each of these can help us to countdown and to prepare.

PRAY

The most important part of our Advent journey. See if you are able to keep a regular prayer time with the children at home; before bedtime often works well. During advent we may pray for:

* Hope for those who are experiencing difficulties
* Expectant mothers
* That the light of Jesus may be seen by more and more people
* Families and family life
* Ourselves – for God's help with things that we find difficult or struggle with

THE SACRAMENTS

During Advent we are asked to use the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) to help to prepare ourselves. We also go to Mass each Sunday which is like a 'mini-Advent' as we prepare to receive Jesus when we receive him in Holy Communion.

WHAT SHOULD MY CHILD KNOW ABOUT ADVENT BY THE END OF PRIMARY SCHOOL?

* Retell the main events, characters and places in the Christmas story (The Nativity of the Lord)
* Know that Mary is the mother of God
* Know the key figures in the history of the People of God (such as John the Baptist and Elizabeth)
* Know the role of Mary and her 'yes' to God's word
* Be familiar with passages which express joy and trust in God's love and be able to talk about the love shown to them and how they can show love to others.
* Know the signs and symbols used in prayer and liturgy during Advent
* Be aware of the joy and challenges of giving and receiving and know how the ways of love for our neighbour can be shown at home, church, locally and globally.
* Know about the concept of the Messiah in the Old and New Testament and the role of the prophets
* Have a developed understanding of the Church's faith that Jesus is the Son of God and his mission as revealed in the New Testament with particular reference to his priestly, prophetic and kingly roles
* Pupils will grow in their understanding of the Church's vocation to have special care for the poor and oppressed and Jesus' response to issues of justice and relationship
* With regards to prayer and liturgy, pupils will be familiar with the rich variety of forms of worship in the Church and the developments of the celebration of liturgy. Ultimately, pupils will be able to understand Catholic Social Teaching and apply this to their lives.