



## Advent - Questions and Answers...

...plus a few notes about Christmas.

### **Q: What special focus does the liturgy offer in the season of Advent?**

A: The Advent season has a twofold purpose. It calls the Christian community to prepare for the celebration of the Birth of Jesus, and for the Incarnation of Christ. It also calls us to a deeper awareness of Christ's second coming at the end of time. Check the readings for key words and phrases: "joyful hope," "bloom," "await." The readings and prayers of Advent nurture in us this sense of preparation and hope. Advent is a time of joyful expectation, as we prepare for the coming of God's Kingdom with prayer and just acts.

### **Q: What holy days of obligation occur in this season?**

A: December 8 is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is a Holy Day of Obligation.

### **Q: What are the restrictions on celebrating special Masses during Advent, like weddings and funerals?**

A: If a wedding is celebrated on a Sunday or Solemnity in Advent, the readings and prayers of the Advent liturgy take precedence, although one reading from the Rite of Marriage may be used. Funeral Masses are prohibited on the Sundays of Advent and on December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, a funeral outside of Mass may be offered even on those days.

### **Q: What other liturgies are suited to the Advent Season?**

A: It is traditional to celebrate the sacrament of penance during the Advent Season, in preparation for the great feast of Christmas. Many parishes offer a communal penance service, with a shared Liturgy of the Word including homily and intercessions, followed by individual confessions. The Rite of Penance includes special texts and prayers specifically for use during the Advent season (see Appendix II, nos. 20-24). Many parishes celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours during Advent. Called "the prayer of the Church," the Liturgy of the Hours sanctifies time with brief liturgies, consisting of psalms, readings, and prayers, throughout the day. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are the most important of the offices. Through the Liturgy of the Hours, the faithful come to treasure the psalms, which nourished the prayer of Jesus and Mary.

### **Q: What is the Advent wreath and how should it be used in the parish?**

A: When a parish decides to use an Advent Wreath, the blessing of the wreath takes place on the First Sunday of Advent or on the evening before. The rite is found in the Book of Blessings, nos. 1509-1540. The Advent wreath may be blessed by a priest or, in his absence, a deacon or lay minister. Following the

prayer of blessing, the first candle is lighted. On the following Sundays, the blessing is not repeated, and the candles are lit either before Mass begins or immediately before the opening prayer of the Mass; no additional rites or prayers are used.

**Q: Is it true that we can use blue vestments during Advent?**

A: No, blue vestments are not permitted. The liturgical color for the season of Advent is violet. While bluer hues of violet may be used during Advent, with redder hues reserved to the Lenten season, blue is not an authorized color for vesture in the United States. Rose-colored vestments are designated for the Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday (with violet as an option).

**A Few Reminders About the Christmas Season:**

- The Christmas season extends from Evening Prayer I of Christmas through the Baptism of the Lord, Monday, 9 January, 2012.
- The Mass of the Vigil of Christmas is celebrated in the evening of 24 December.
- On Christmas Day there are three traditional Masses celebrated (at Midnight, at Dawn, and during the Day—there are various options for readings. Check the Lectionary #13-16)
- During the Creed, at the words "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man," all genuflect.
- The nativity scene is a tradition which originated with St. Francis of Assisi, who prepared the first crèche in 1223. The Book of Blessings includes a note on the placement of the nativity scene. "A place should be chosen that is suitable for prayer and devotion and is easily accessible by the faithful" (1544), but the nativity scene should not be placed in the sanctuary. The Book of Blessings includes texts for the Blessing of a Manger Scene (Chapter 48, Nos. 1541-1569). The blessing usually takes place on Christmas Eve. The blessing may be given during a short Liturgy of the Word, during a carol service, or during the Vigil Mass of Christmas.