

Waiting in Joyful Hope

Advent & Christmas Traditions

“Advent is a new beginning. With the universal church, we are invited to prepare our minds and hearts to... welcome Jesus more deeply into our lives, be it through the pondering of Scripture, reaching out to the needy, or celebrating the sacraments week after week... Our focus in Advent is on the person of Jesus who came to restore unity... Jesus’ prayer is that all may be one, one with the Father and one community.” (Morneau, 3)

One way we can focus ourselves on preparing for the “celebration of Jesus’ birth, both the historical event itself and the saving event of the coming of God in flesh, Christ’s return at the end of the world, and his coming into our lives every day” (Dues, 3), is to join together as community to practice some popular traditions with Catholics throughout the world. This is a way to bring “the reason for the season” into our homes and families in a concrete way.

Advent Wreath

One of the most popular traditions today, along with the Christmas tree, is the lighting of candles of and Advent wreath. This tradition is a concrete way in which we can watch the Advent season unfold gradually in joyful anticipation of Christmas. “The Advent Wreath is made of evergreens and is placed on a table...There are four candles, one for each week of Advent.” (Dues, 5) Traditionally, three of the candles are purple, and one is rose, which is lit the third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete or “Rejoice” Sunday), symbolizing that we are half way to the joy of Christmas.

“Light increases, pushing out darkness, with another candle lit [each Sunday of Advent] until all four are burning... It represents the long time when people lived in spiritual darkness, waiting for the coming of the Messiah, the light of the world. Each year in Advent, people wait once again in darkness for the coming of the Lord, his historical coming in the mystery of Bethlehem, his final coming at the end of time, and his special coming in every moment of grace.” (Dues, 6)

This week before Advent, create an Advent wreath with your family and place it in a prominent place in your home. Light another candle on each Sunday of Advent as well as at family dinner throughout that week, perhaps at the time when the family says grace before a meal. Together, let us wait in joyful hope for the coming of Jesus Christ during this Advent Season.

Dues, Greg. *Catholic Customs & Traditions: Advent & Christmas*. Twenty-Third Publications: New London, Connecticut, 2008.

Morneau, Robert F. *Daily Reflections for Advent & Christmas: Waiting in Joyful Hope 2014-15*. Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 2014.