

AN ADVENT REFLECTION

Advent remains a season of contrasts. It is a time of preparation for Christmas but it also coincides with the end of the school year and the beginning of the long summer holidays. It is always a hectic time and it is sometimes difficult to find space to stop and reflect.

The Advent Season began as a time of preparation for those who were to be baptized on the feast of the Epiphany. Since Lent was a time of preparation for Baptism at Easter, Advent was modelled on Lent.

In 6th Century France, Gregory of Tours mentions a penitential season lasting from 11 November, the feast of St Martin of Tours, to Christmas. It was later called "St Martin's Lent". In Rome the season lasted six weeks as it still does today in Milan.

When our liturgical calendar was revised in 1969 Advent was seen both as a time of preparation for Christmas and as a time to look forward to the second coming of Christ. It no longer is considered a penitential season like Lent but some of the old elements have continued such as the use of purple vestments.

At St Mary's we distinguish the two "purple seasons" by using a "red purple" vestment in Lent and a "blue purple" one in Advent.

The third Sunday of Advent has traditionally reflected the joy of preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas. In Latin it was known as *Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday* from the words of the Entrance Antiphon: *Rejoice in the Lord always*.

The rose candle and the rose vestments recall the time when Advent was still seen as a penitential season. The change of colour still serves to reinforce the theme of rejoicing.

The figure of John the Baptist also continues to feature in Advent. Last Sunday's Gospel reminded us that John came to prepare the way of the Lord. Now we see in Luke's Gospel how John prepared the way by calling on various people to change their way of life. How do we prepare to celebrate Christmas?

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