

AN ADVENT REFLECTION

ADVENT – WAITING IN HOPE



The Season of Advent opens the Church's liturgical year. The English word "advent" comes from the Latin *adventus* and literally means "coming". In pagan Rome "adventus" was the word for the celebration of the anniversary of the coming of the Emperor.

The early Christians took over the term and used it for the time of preparation for Christmas when they celebrated the first coming of Christ. That remains the focus of the last week of Advent.

However, the season begins by looking to the future, not to Christmas but to the second coming of Christ in glory. In that sense the first weeks of Advent continue the focus of the last Sunday of the Church's year, the feast of Christ the King.

By the end of the fourth century, as the Christmas season became established in Spain and Gaul, Advent emerged as a time of preparation for those who were to be baptized on the feast of the Epiphany and so it came to be seen as a "second Lent".

At one time it extended for 40 days from the feast of St Martin (11 November) to the Epiphany (6 January) leading to the popular name of "St Martin's Lent".

The traditional use of purple or violet vestments recalls that connection with Lent. But Advent is not a penitential season. At St Mary's, we distinguish the different seasons by using a blue-purple for Advent and red-purple for Lent.

In Rome the season of Advent did not become established until the middle of the sixth century. By then the link with preparation for Baptism had diminished as had the earlier penitential practices. Pope Gregory the Great (591-604) reduced Advent to four Sundays to make a clear distinction between Advent and Lent.

In Advent we continue to use Alleluia as our Gospel acclamation but the *Gloria* is not said or sung. It is omitted so that may resound with greater freshness at Christmas.

Popular devotions such as the Advent wreath give a focus to our waiting in hope for the coming of Christ.

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