

The Season of Advent

As early as the 5th century AD, the Christian Church set aside the weeks leading up to Christmas and called this the season of Advent. This year, Advent begins on November 28 and ends on Christmas Eve.

The word *advent* comes from the Latin word meaning ‘coming’ or ‘arrival.’

This is a holy time of the year when we remember the coming of God into our world. The season of Advent is certainly about Christmas and the birth of Jesus, but that is not all. It is also about anticipating the *future* coming of God.

The first arrival, the first advent, was the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. On that day, God joined with creation in an unprecedented way. God took on our flesh and became one with us. In his life and ministry, Jesus was *Emmanuel*, which means God-with-us. In this man, God’s own self participated in our joy and our sorrow – even our death. This was the beginning of something new, a change in the very fabric of the universe. “The kingdom of God has come near to you,” Jesus would later say to his students. We celebrate this first arrival in the season of Advent.

But that’s only half of the story. Eventually Jesus’ ministry on earth came to an end – a horrible end. He was killed by an unholy alliance of government and those who used their religion to gain power. The God who came near to us was beaten and rejected and sent away. If Advent is just about ‘anticipating Christmas’ then our celebration risks becoming sentimentality. Because Jesus is no longer here in the flesh, and it genuinely looks like God’s beloved creation has not yet been fully healed and raised to life. And yet, there is hope for something more to come.

In the season of Advent, we also look forward to the arrival of God in the future: the second coming of Christ. We declare that the present sorrows and deaths of our world will not have the last word. We believe this because the crucified Christ was raised again, and left us with the promise that we, too, would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living on that day. It’s a promise that the future will be different from both the past and the present. We will be raised, and God’s kingdom of justice and peace will come to this place. This is the Christian hope.

In this season of Advent, we remember with joyful gratitude the first arrival of God among us. And we proclaim our hope, in the words of the hymn writer, that “Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heaven be one.”