



Introduction to the Season

First Sunday of Advent
3rd December 2023

Advent: Introduction to the Season from Common Worship Times and Seasons

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming (*adventus*) of Christ in his incarnation, and also looks ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time. The readings and liturgies not only direct us towards Christ's birth, they also challenge the modern reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement:

*Every eye shall now behold him
robed in dreadful majesty.* (Charles Wesley)

The Four Last Things – Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell – have been traditional themes for Advent meditation. The characteristic note of Advent is therefore expectation, rather than penitence, although the character of the season is easily coloured by an analogy with Lent. The anticipation of Christmas under commercial pressure has also made it harder to sustain the appropriate sense of alert watchfulness, but the fundamental Advent prayer remains 'Maranatha' – 'Our Lord, come' (1 Corinthians 16.22). Church decorations are simple and spare, and purple is the traditional liturgical colour. In the northern hemisphere, the Advent season falls at the darkest time of the year, and the natural symbols of darkness and light are powerfully at work throughout Advent and Christmas. The lighting of candles on an Advent wreath was imported into Britain from northern Europe in the nineteenth century, and is now a common practice. The Moravian custom of the Christingle has similarly enjoyed great success in Britain since the latter part of the twentieth century, with the encouragement of the Children's Society; Christingle services may take place before or after Christmas. The Third Sunday of Advent was observed in medieval times as a splash of colour in the restrained atmosphere of Advent (*Gaudete* or 'Rose Sunday'), and the last days of Advent were marked by the sequence of Great 'O' Antiphons, which continue to inspire modern Advent hymns and meditations.

17 December – O Sapientia O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence. *cf Ecclesiasticus 24.3; Wisdom 8.1*

18 December – O Adonai O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm. *cf Exodus 3.2; 24.12*

19 December – O Radix Jesse O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: Come and deliver us, and delay no longer. *cf Isaiah 11.10; 45.14; 52.15; Romans 15.12*

20 December – O Clavis David O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. *cf Isaiah 22.22; 42.7*

21 December – O Oriens O Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. *cf Malachi 4.2*

22 December – O Rex Gentium O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay. *cf Isaiah 28.16; Ephesians 2.14*

23 December – O Emmanuel O Emmanuel, our King and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Saviour: Come and save us, O Lord our God. *cf Isaiah 7.14*

