



The Season of ADVENT

By not celebrating Advent, a congregation misses an important worship experience.



Anticipating Christ

by Daniel Tomberlin

MANY CENTURIES AGO, the Church established a sacred calendar to inspire its worship. The calendar focused on God's saving acts as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The first sacred season is Advent—a season of expectation.

For centuries, the Hebrew prophets declared the coming of the Anointed One. The Hebrew people patiently waited for the "consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). Each year as the Church celebrates Advent, the people of God experience a season of hopeful expectation. Just as the ancient Hebrews anticipated the advent of the Messiah, the Church presently anticipates the second advent of Jesus Christ. Advent focuses our worship on the fullness of Christ's redemption—His incarnation and consummation. Thinking of the sacred calendar as a clock is helpful to understanding Advent. Just as 12 o'clock is the ending and beginning of the day, so too Advent is the ending and beginning of the sacred calendar.

Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas (always the last Sunday of November or the first Sunday of December). Traditionally, churches celebrate the four Sundays of Advent, emphasizing biblical themes of expectation and hope, in this order:

1. The Second Advent of Christ (Matt. 24:37-44; Mark 13:24-37; Luke 21:25-36)
2. The Ministry of John the Baptist: Prepare the Way of the Lord (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-6)
3. The Ministry of the Coming One (Matt. 11:2-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28; Luke 3:7-18).
4. The Virgin Birth of Christ (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-55).

Because Advent has not been celebrated in most Pentecostal churches, its themes might seem somewhat alien. However, Advent can be a meaningful part of Pentecostal worship.

The celebration traditionally centers on an evergreen wreath displayed in the front of the sanctuary. The wreath has four candles placed around the circumference and a fifth candle (the Christ candle) in the center. A particular candle is lit each Sunday while an accompanying song is sung or Scripture passage is read.

This is a good opportunity to involve children or entire families. The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the growing anticipation of the coming of the Light of the World. The lighting of the Christ candle should take place during a Christmas Eve service or as the final act of worship on the fourth Sunday of Advent.

An Advent wreath can also be used in Christian homes as a teaching device to instruct our children about the "reason for the season." According to legend, the Advent candles of believers illuminated the entire Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries.

For the past several years, I have designated the midweek services during Advent to teach the biblical and traditional foundations for the Advent/Christmas season. This includes lessons on the infancy narratives of the Gospels as well as historical background behind other seasonal images, such as the Virgin Mary, the wise men, and the star of Bethlehem. This is also an excellent time to teach the story and traditions about Nicholas of Myra, the ancient bishop who has been transformed into Santa Claus.

It may surprise many Christian parents to discover that most of the contemporary themes of Christmas celebrations—Santa and his elves, gift giving, and Rudolph—are less than 150 years old. The present culture has co-opted, redefined, and even paganized a holy season of the Christian church. If we are to preserve the significance of the Advent season, it must begin with intentional observances in church and at home. ☩

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Season of Waiting

by Ben Wiles

AS A YOUNG MAN growing up in the Church of God, I was not exposed to the observance of Advent. December was about Christmas—Jesus Christ being born of the Virgin Mary in the little town of Bethlehem. As a pastor, I continued this observance, often speaking about giving and the significance of the coming of *Immanuel*—"God with us"—to earth.