

ADVENT SEASON 2023

Good morning, friends in Christ.

Today we start another new year calendar of the church.

Here is some information about the Liturgical Calendar which begins with Advent in comparison to other calendars.

Generally, when one talks about ‘calendar,’ they are talking about the one introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in the year 1582. It is the Gregorian calendar, or the solar calendar based on the movement of the earth around the sun.¹

Did you know that there are 168 countries around the world that use the Gregorian Calendar as their main (or civil) calendar. 18 countries use another calendar alongside it (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, etc.); while 4 countries use a modified version (Japan, North Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand), while 4 other countries have not adopted it (Afghanistan, Iran, Ethiopia, and Nepal). So, there are other calendars in use (Jewish, Islamic, Indian, Chinese, Persian, and Julian).²

The church has its own history with its calendar or Liturgical Year, starting with the Season of Advent, a preparation by the faithful before Christmas. This begins closest to the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle (Nov. 30) and spans four Sundays. When did it begin? We are not sure. However, this period which included Christmas was a long season of preparation for the Feast of the Epiphany, a day when converts were baptised. It was a period of 40 days (expanded from 3 weeks) similar to Lent. Further revision of the Advent Calendar continued. Advent was observed over five Sundays in the 5th century. Around the 9th century the church designated the first Sunday of Advent as the beginning of the Church Year. It was the 11th century Pope Gregory VII who reduced the number of Sundays in Advent to four.³

We, in this dispensation are awaiting the return of Jesus, called the second coming. This mirrors the long preparation found in the Old Testament as they waited for their Messiah, which was a much longer period than four weeks. We set aside this period now for deep reflection and so we are encouraged to “Live out the Advent.” – Advent is from the Latin ‘adventus,’ which means “coming.” All the theme around this season is preparatory.

Over the next four Sundays then, we make this journey, amidst the hustle and bustle, but with deep focus and spiritual richness, not to be missed. We have made some slight adjustments to the usual bulletin to reflect this Advent Preparation and I have used the Theme “The BC Road Trip to the Manger of Bethlehem,” giving us the feel of the movement of travel and rest stops until our arrival at the Manger of Bethlehem. See the websites listed here for more information.

¹ ([What Calendar Do We Use? | About the Gregorian Calendar \(familysearch.org\)](#)).

² Ibid

³ [The Liturgical Season of Advent \(catholiceducation.org\)](#)

THE SERMONS

Advent 1 - Hope

Sermon Topic: “Stargazing Amidst the Signs”

Mark 13:24-37

Friends in Christ, our Advent Season Road Trip begins today. We're embarking on a thrilling journey – “A BC Road Trip to the Manger of Bethlehem!”

Picture this: winding roads, scenic stops, and a GPS set for the most sacred destination of all time – the humble manger in Bethlehem where our Savior was born.

In the spirit of a Canadian road trip, where the journey is as important as the destination, we're about to traverse through the beautiful landscapes of Scripture. From cosmic signs that light up the celestial sky to the wilderness echoes of John preparing the way, our road trip promises to be nothing short of extraordinary.

As we navigate this spiritual highway, each reading becomes a scenic stop, offering breathtaking views of God's promises and the anticipation of the ultimate Christmas destination – the manger where hope, love, joy, and peace were born. So, fuel up your faith, adjust your spiritual GPS, and let's hit the road together. Who knows what divine detours and awe-inspiring moments await us?

The journey begins now, and the manger of Bethlehem is our heartwarming final stop. With all on board, let's fasten our seatbelts (see our car seat – children are on the journey too) fellow travelers, as we embark on this Advent Road Trip – a journey of reflection, discovery, and joyful anticipation. Onward to Bethlehem we go, St. Matthew!

Let us pray

In anticipation to meet you in the manger of Bethlehem O Lord, we sent out now on this spiritual journey. May this be truly meaningful to us. Be with us. Be our Tour Guide. And dear God, Surprise us again. Surprise us we pray. Amen.

Fellow stargazers on this celestial road trip to Bethlehem, we will be making our first pit stop at **The Celestial Skyline**. Imagine with me that this space is transformed with starry backdrops, twinkling lights, and beautiful decoration along with what we have here this morning. Let us star-gaze in this sacred space.



In Mark 13, Jesus paints a cosmic masterpiece of signs that will accompany His return – the sun darkening, the stars falling, and the Son of Man arriving in clouds. Many of us have gazed at the night sky and marveled at the vastness of the cosmos. The same God who flung stars into space invites us today to ponder the signs as the second coming draws near.

Imagine standing beneath a sky ablaze with divine fireworks. We know what that is like. People all over love fireworks and Canadians too. There are always different kinds of emotions in those moments. I wonder what emotions would stir within you standing beneath a sky ablaze with divine fireworks. Fear? Awe? Anticipation? The celestial signs are not mere astronomical events; they are heavenly heralds proclaiming the imminent arrival of our King. Just as ancient sailors navigated by the stars, we will get to the star of Bethlehem and the wise men, just as our indigenous people can tell us stories of the night skies, and our farmers too, these signs do serve to guide us on our spiritual journey.

In the darkest nights of our lives, of doubts and questions and uncertainties, these cosmic promises remind us that God's light will pierce through. Yes, these celestial signs are here reminding and assuring us that God's plan is unfolding.

But let's not be mere stargazers this morning. Let us take it a step further on our journey as we prepare to hit the road again after this lovely rest stop at **The Celestial Skyline**. Let's be star-followers, like the Magi on their own journey to the manger. The celestial signs are not just distant wonders but guides illuminating our path toward the light of the world.

Jesus urges us this morning, as we move on, to “keep watch” – to pay attention, not in fear, but in eager anticipation! It's a time to gaze at the cosmic signs and align our hearts with the rhythm of God's eternal plan, hence the pause in this Advent season to watch, wait and prepare.

So, fellow travelers, let us continue to engage in this holy stargazing, embrace the signs, find comfort in the constellations of God's promises, and set our hearts aglow with the hope that transcends even the darkest nights.

Our next stop - Stop 2: John Fraser's Riverside Preparations (Mark 1:1-8). which is a little distance away. As we continue our journey, remember that the cosmic signs not only point to a future event but also illuminate our present path.

I invite us now to make a spiritual Reaffirmation:

Advent 1 Reaffirmation

Mother Miranda: Let our gaze take us forward. Are you ready?

**ALL: Yes we are ready! “Our hearts are set for the Manger of Bethlehem,
guided by the celestial wonders.
Jesus is coming again!”**

May this stop for us, fill our hearts with awe, anticipation, and hope, now and for evermore.
Amen.