




A Guide to the Advent Season





Waiting, but not on hold...

Dear friends in Christ,

Advent invites us into a very particular kind of waiting—a waiting that is active, hopeful, and alive. It is waiting, but not on hold. So much of the waiting we do in daily life feels stagnant: we wait for the phone to ring, for an appointment to begin, for someone to call our name. That kind of waiting shrinks us, drains us, and leaves us feeling powerless.

But Advent's waiting is something entirely different. It's the kind of anticipation that lifts the heart. It is more like counting down the days to a long-dreamed-of vacation or preparing for a beloved guest to arrive. It's the waiting that energizes us, sharpens our attention, and fills us with expectation. Each candle lit, each prayer whispered, each Scripture read nudges us a little closer to the joy we know is coming.

This season reorients us toward that kind of waiting. We are not simply passing the time until Christmas; we are preparing ourselves to notice the ways Christ is coming among us even now—quietly, compassionately, persistently. Advent trains our attention and opens our hearts so that when the Christ child arrives, He does not find us distracted, but ready.

My prayer is that this Advent Guide helps you lean into that holy, hopeful anticipation. May these days draw you deeper into God's presence and closer to one another. As always, St. Stephen's is better with your presence. I look forward to keeping the season with you.



What is Advent?

Advent marks the beginning of the Church's year—a season that invites us to slow down, listen, and look for the ways God is drawing near. The word Advent means “coming,” and during these weeks we remember both Christ's birth in Bethlehem while also awaiting Christ's second coming in glory. Advent reminds us that God is always approaching, always seeking us in love.

This season has its own color and character. The deep blues in our worship space reflect hope and the expectant sky before dawn—signs that something new is about to break forth. Blue is also closely associated with Mary.

One of Advent's most enduring symbols is the Advent wreath. Its circle speaks of God's unending love; its evergreens, of life that persists even in winter; its candles, of the growing light of Christ. Each Sunday we light another candle, marking our journey through the season.

Each candle corresponds to a theme that shapes our reflection. We'll explore those themes in the pages ahead. For now, Advent begins with a simple invitation: open your heart, watch for the light, and trust that God is near.



“Advent is a season to watch for the light and remember that God is always drawing near.”

Advent Themes

01 WEEK ONE: HOPE

Hope is the trust that God is at work even before we can see the results. It turns our attention toward what God is preparing and helps us look at the world with expectation instead of fear.

02 WEEK TWO: PEACE

Peace is God's gift of wholeness—within ourselves, in our relationships, and in the world God loves. Advent peace invites us to slow down, breathe deeply, and make room for God's calming presence.

03 WEEK THREE: JOY

Joy is the quiet delight that grows from knowing we are held by God. It is steady, resilient, and often surprising—showing up even in ordinary moments as a reminder that grace is near.

04 WEEK FOUR: LOVE

Love is the center of Advent: God drawing near to us with compassion and tenderness. It calls us to respond with generosity and care, reflecting the love we have first received.



PURPLE OR BLUE?

FOR CENTURIES, ADVENT WAS TRADITIONALLY MARKED WITH PURPLE, A COLOR ASSOCIATED WITH REPENTANCE AND ROYALTY.

IN MANY ANGLICAN AND EPISCOPAL CHURCHES TODAY, YOU'LL ALSO SEE DEEP BLUE—A COLOR NOT ONLY ASSOCIATED WITH JESUS' MOTHER MARY, BUT ALSO ONE THAT EMPHASIZES HOPE, EXPECTATION, AND THE DAWNING LIGHT OF CHRIST. BOTH TRADITIONS ARE FAITHFUL TO THE SEASON; BLUE SIMPLY SHIFTS THE TONE FROM PENITENCE TO ANTICIPATION.

AT ST. STEPHEN'S, OUR BLUE VESTMENTS AND CANDLES ECHO THE WIDENING SKY BEFORE SUNRISE, REMINDING US THAT THE LIGHT IS COMING.

Home Prayers for Advent

Each week of Advent, you can use the prayers and scripture readings in this guide to create a short, meaningful time of worship at home. There is no set formula—just a gentle rhythm you can adapt for your household.

Choose a consistent evening, gather around your Advent wreath, and begin by lighting the candle for the week. Read the scripture passage aloud, pausing for a moment of silence or shared reflection. Then pray the weekly prayer together, either as printed or in your own words. If you like, end with a favorite Advent hymn, the Lord's Prayer, or simply a quiet moment together before blowing out the candle.

In a season full of activity, these few minutes of shared prayer can become a grounding ritual—an anchor of peace, hope, and connection as you prepare for Christmas.

How to light your wreath

In the first week of Advent, begin by lighting the candle directly opposite the pink candle. Each following week, light one additional candle, moving to the next candle in a clockwise direction. By the third week, you'll light the rose candle, and in the fourth week, all four candles will shine together. An optional, white candle can be placed in the middle and lit on Christmas Eve.

Week 1 (Blue)

Week 2 (Blue)

Week 4 (Blue)

Week 3 (Pink)





Advent Wreath Prayers

You can use these weekly wreath prayers in whatever way fits your household—at the dinner table, before bed, or during a quiet moment in the evening. Light the candle for the week, read the prayer slowly, and let the small flame draw your attention to God’s presence. You might invite others to share brief prayers or simple reflections, or simply sit for a moment in silence. There’s no one right way to do this; the wreath is simply a gentle reminder to pause, breathe, and notice the growing light as we journey toward Christmas.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 30: HOPE

Holy God, as we light this first candle, kindle in us the gift of hope. In a world longing for peace, help us trust your promise. Come, Lord Jesus, and make your home among us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 40:1–5

REFLECTION:

Where do you long for hope in your life or in the world?

WEEK OF DECEMBER 7: PEACE

God of peace, calm our hearts as we prepare for your coming. Teach us to be makers of peace in our homes, our church, and our community. Shine your gentle light upon us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 11:1–6

REFLECTION:

What small act of peace can you practice this week?

Why Pink in Advent?

On the third Sunday of Advent, the candle color shifts from deep blue to rose, marking a noticeable change in the season's mood. Traditionally called Gaudete Sunday—"Rejoice" in Latin—this day offers a break in Advent's quieter, more reflective tone. The pink candle signals a moment of joy and encouragement, reminding us that the coming of Christ is drawing near. It invites us to lift our heads, soften our hearts, and recognize the light already breaking into our midst.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 14: JOY

Joyful God, as we light the rose candle, awaken in us gratitude and delight. Help us find joy not only in celebration but in service and compassion. Amen.

SCRIPTURE:

Philippians 4:4-6

REFLECTION:

Where have you experienced unexpected joy lately?

WEEK OF DECEMBER 14: LOVE

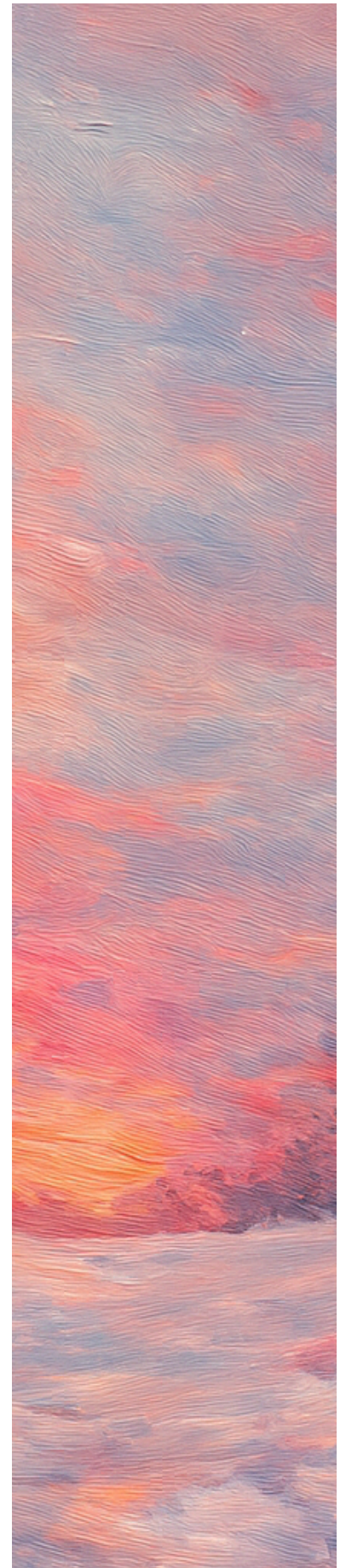
God of love, fill our hearts with your compassion and tenderness. As Christmas draws near, prepare us to welcome Christ with open hearts. Amen.

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 1:26-38

REFLECTION:

What does God's unconditional love mean to you?



Advent Practices for Busy People



Advent always seems to arrive in one of the most crowded stretches of the year. Calendars fill quickly, errands multiply, and the pace of life can feel anything but prayerful. That's why the practices of Advent are intentionally small. You don't need long hours of silence or perfect discipline—just a few simple moments of attention. Light a candle at dinner. Pause for a deep breath before starting the car. Offer a short prayer while waiting in line. Step outside at night to notice the stars. These small acts are enough to shift our hearts and help us remember that God meets us right where we are. **Advent is not about doing more; it's about noticing more.** Even the smallest pause can make room for hope to grow.

SMALL PRACTICES TO TRY

- ✓ Light your wreath at dinner.
- ✓ Pray “Come, Lord Jesus” once every morning.
- ✓ Choose an item to donate each week or each day.
- ✓ Sit in silence for two minutes before bed.
- ✓ Write a note of encouragement to someone each week.
- ✓ Read a Gospel passage on Sundays.

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Waiting is not wasting time. Waiting is spiritual work.

Mary waited.

Joseph waited.

The world waited.

*And God came—not when everything was perfect, but
right in the midst of our ordinary, messy human
lives.*

*Where might God be meeting you in your waiting this
year?*



Advent Activities



Wreath Making

On November 30th, join us in church as we learn the meaning and history of the Advent wreath. All are invited to construct their own wreath to bring home for the Advent season.

Gifts for Life

Sean McConnell from Episcopal Relief & Development will share the many ways to empower people worldwide through **Gifts for Life**. A Chili Cook Off and Bottles of Hope event after church will also benefit ERD.



Ugly Sweater & Xmas Cards

On December 14th, come to church in your gaudiest Christmas Sweater. If you send a family Christmas Card, bring it to share with the parish family!

Cookie Decorating & Christmas Party

On December 21, help our Sunday School Students decorate cookies. In the evening, bring a bite or beverage and join us at the Rectory for our Parish Christmas Party.



Christmas Services

Christmas Eve Family Service and Children's Pageant - 4PM

A joyful and lively celebration featuring our children's Christmas Pageant, perfect for families of all ages as we welcome the birth of Jesus together.

Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols by Candlelight - 8PM

A breathtaking candlelight service of scripture and song, weaving the story of salvation in a beautiful, contemplative celebration of Christ's birth.

Christmas Eve "Midnight Mass" - 11PM

A quiet and reverent celebration welcoming Christmas Day with candlelight, beauty, and the mystery of Christ's birth at the threshold of midnight.

Christmas Day Service - 10AM

A warm and joyful Christmas morning Eucharist as we give thanks for the birth of Jesus and celebrate the light of Christ in our midst.

Sundays in Christmas - 8&10AM

Use this space to provide your answer. You can add details or examples to help your reader along!

An Advent Blessing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

May the Christ who comes at Christmas find your heart open and ready.

May the Spirit guide your steps, keep your watchful waiting gentle, and lead you always into the light of love.

Amen.

At the end of our Advent journey, we invite you to share in the wonder and of Christmas. Interested in having your little one participate in our Christmas Eve Pageant? Scan the QR code for more information.

