



# WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

*for Children*

## ADVENT

### ***Overview of the Church Season and Lessons***

*Advent* means “*coming*.” It is the first season of the church year and begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, ending on Christmas Eve. During this time, we prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ, in two ways:

- First, we prepare for the coming of Jesus, who will be born in Bethlehem. The prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah, foretold the coming of a Messiah, who would bring salvation to the world, ushering in a messianic age. This prophecy is one of God’s promises to the people of Israel: God will save us. Through Jesus, the promise is fulfilled.
- Second, we prepare in Advent for the coming of Jesus in glory at the end of time. He will come to judge the people of the earth and to inaugurate his kingdom, the new reign of the kingdom of God, which will have no end.

### **The Readings**

Our readings during the four Sundays in Advent reflect this time of preparation. During Advent, we remember and honor those who prepared the way for Jesus: the prophets, the parents of John the Baptist (Zechariah and Elizabeth) and the parents of Jesus (Mary and Joseph).

The prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of the Messiah and describes the Messiah to us. In the readings of the Suffering Servant, the Peaceable Kingdom and the coming of the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” we as Christians see Jesus Christ and his ushering in of the kingdom of heaven. We see the one who “makes all things new.”

Other prophets, such as Malachi, tell of a messenger coming to prepare the way: “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” (Malachi 3:1). In the New Testament, John the Baptist fulfills this role of messenger. He announces the coming of the kingdom of heaven with the words of Isaiah: “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3). John announces that he is here to prepare the way for the One sent from God.

Mary learns of the coming of Christ, and her own special role in this, from the archangel Gabriel, who comes to her to tell her of the child that she is to carry: “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High... He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

Joseph hears about his own role as the earthly father of the heavenly king, in a dream: “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Because we await the coming of Christ also at the end of time, Jesus’ apocalyptic sayings, especially found in Matthew, are included in our Advent readings. These sayings foretell events at the coming of the end of the age. Jesus warns us, “Keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42). Our mood at this time, then, is one of watchfulness.

“Might Jesus’ second coming encompass both an outward, physical event and an inner event of the mind and heart? Indeed, it is often the apocalyptic events of our lives that bring us from a time of ‘running our own shows’ (at great distance from God) into a new, deeper relationship with God” (*Growing Together: Celebrations for your Entire Church Family*, Vol. 1, Denver, CO: Living the Good News, 1999).

## The Liturgical Season

Since medieval times, Advent and Lent have been paired as complementary “penitential” seasons. Now, however, Advent is regaining its place in our church year as a time of preparation more than as a time of repentance, although repentance is an important part of preparation for our Lord. Our focus during Advent is one of joyful anticipation.

If we celebrate Advent as a time of repentance, the liturgical color is purple as in Lent. If we celebrate Advent as a time of preparation, the liturgical color is a rich blue.

## The Symbols

A traditional symbol for Advent is the Advent wreath. The circular shape of the wreath symbolizes the never-ending grace and love of God. The candles have come to mean various things. In some traditions, they symbolize the Christian themes of faith, hope, love and joy. Or they may symbolize the shepherds, the angels, the star of Bethlehem and the Virgin Mary. The large candle in the center is the Christ Candle, which is lit on Christmas Eve and remains lit during the Christmas season.

Advent reminds us also that Jesus Christ comes to us in the sacrament of his body and blood—the Holy Eucharist—and in his words—the word of God. As God-made-flesh, Jesus is present all around us, but especially in the celebration that he gave us at the supper just before he died for us: “Take this and eat. This is my body that is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.” During the season of Advent, let us keep the real presence of Christ before us.