

LITURGICAL LIVING

Series 12: November 12-18



What's the Deal with Advent?

Advent begins on December 3rd! Okay, so why are we already talking about Advent, here? Because, I recently saw an online poll and upwards of 25% of people put their Christmas decorations up the day after Halloween.

The liturgical calendar begins with Advent in the Latin Catholic Church. This means that the start of the church year begins with preparations for the birth of Jesus! During this time we prepare ourselves to receive Jesus in our hearts and homes. That's why Advent is traditionally a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. There is beauty in this time of preparation and **waiting**. The challenge is to keep Advent, Advent and keep Christmas, Christmas. Why is this important? How can this be done?

Waiting can help us stretch the desire that we all naturally have for God and reveal to us what our hearts truly long for. For this reason, throughout Church history the weeks leading up to Christmas were a time of waiting and mindful preparation. Advent is a time to enter into the **waiting** for the birth of a baby. There is great joy in this, but it is an expectant and hopeful joy. Much like Joseph and Mary waited nine months and the Jews waited thousands of years for the birth of the Messiah. We should do our best to live as these saints and faithful did-not looking to skip forward.

But, with Christmas, we easily get caught up and race ahead. Growing up for me, the day after Thanksgiving was the day to put the tree up, start the Christmas music, watch some Hallmark movies and start making cookies. And when Christmas did arrive, it was all done. The chance for joyful celebration was thrown out with the gift wrappers.

Here are some things to consider to incorporate into your Advent to keep Advent, Advent. Next week, we will go over more Advent traditions.

Complete Christmas shopping before Advent begins

- Now, this may sound stressful but I really appreciated this in the last few years. I make my list and complete most if not all of my shopping before Advent. Shopping may seem like a part of preparation and some people may enjoy shopping so this is not a steadfast rule. But for me, personally, I dread shopping. The hustle and bustle and the stress does me no good.
- Completing the shopping early also helps me to avoid impulse buys, helping me not to overspend and overdo presents. Commercialism of Christmas is something that can suck up the joy of Christmas. The pushing out earlier and earlier just tempts me to want more and more stuff. Keeping Advent helps me to avoid this desire for things; keeping me more fixed on Jesus.
- Since shopping is done, we focus more on giving than receiving during Advent. We try to make presents for siblings, family, and friends.

Decorate as a process as opposed to a box to check

- I am not going to wait until Christmas to put up any decorations. That is something I would not do. I find great joy in decorating for the season and I see this as an important aspect of preparation for Christmas.
- We do keep it simple during Advent. We get our Nativity set (not all of the pieces!), the Advent Calendar and the Advent Wreath. We also always get a real tree. We get it once Advent starts and only put up the lights for the first few weeks and as Christmas approaches, add the ornaments.



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What's the Deal with Advent? (Continued)

Enjoy what Advent has to Offer

I think pushing Christmas earlier and earlier prevents us from taking advantage of what Advent offers our souls and relationships. Keeping Advent as Advent helps us fight the temptation to buy our happiness during this time. Instead, Advent can be a time to intentionally spend more time as a family. Take this time to slow down as a family and avoid the distractions of the world through completing crafts, baking and reading together.

Let's be real

With this in mind, should we avoid parties and have no fun during Advent? No. Still go to the "Christmas party"...I mean, "Advent" party. Eat the treats provided. Just because there is encouragement to really try to wait for Christmas, it doesn't mean that you're necessarily wrong if you don't. I have seen both practical and spiritual benefits in our family life but we didn't just cut everything out. We work together to slowly add and slowly take away the things that work and the things don't work. There's benefit for everybody in this.

St. Margaret of Scotland (16)

St. Margaret of Scotland was an English princess born in Hungary around 1045. Her family fled England when she was about 10 and when they were to return to England, a storm pushed their ship to Scotland. The King welcomed them and fell deeply in love with St. Margaret. They married in 1070. Together they had 8 children. They lived as a holy family, a domestic church. Together they prayed often and worked together to help the poor, the orphaned, the widowed and the sick in Scotland.

St. Margaret was known for her kind-nature and life of virtue. She was known for her life of holiness as a wife and mother and a lover of Christ! She also worked to reform the Church and founded monasteries.



Celebrate

St. Margaret is the patron saint of service to the poor. What can we do to be more like her?

- We can talk about the life of St. Margaret of Scotland. What happened when she and her family sailed from England? How did she become queen of Scotland? What did she do to help others? How can we help people who are hungry or sick?
- We can start each day with prayer like St. Margaret did. We can offer our day to God with our own words or with a prayer such as the following: "God, thank you for the gift of this new day. Help me to serve others in what I do and say. Amen."
- We can reach out to others by making Thanksgiving cards for people who are in care centers or hospitals.

Prayer

Merciful God, you gave the holy Queen Margaret of Scotland great love for the poor. Lend your ear to the intercessions of this holy woman and help us to live after her example so that your goodness and mercy becomes visible in today's world. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.