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Seasoning the Seasons™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

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The Season of Advent

Happy New (Liturgical) Year!

While it's too early to celebrate Christmas (the Christmas Season begins at sundown December 24th), it's a perfect time to celebrate the New Year! With the first Sunday of Advent, we begin a new Liturgical, or Church, Year.

The word advent means "coming." During Advent we prepare for two comings of Christ. We prepare for Christmas and the celebration of Christ's incarnation, and we prepare for Christ's second coming at the end of time.

Advent begins the eve of the fourth Sunday before Christmas, always the Sunday closest to the November 30th Feast of Saint Andrew. Therefore, Advent is not always four weeks long. It is possible some years that the fourth Sunday of Advent could be December 24th!

Advent is a time of preparation and waiting. Violet, which expresses penance, sorrow, and/or waiting is the primary liturgical color during this season. Rose, however, is the color for the third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday. The word *gaudete* is Latin for *rejoice*. The entrance antiphon for Mass the third Sunday of Advent begins with the words from Saint Paul's Letter to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always." On this third Sunday of Advent we rejoice in the fact that the Lord is near.

It is only in keeping Advent and not rushing the Christmas Season that we will be ready for the Lord when he comes!



Lighting the first candle of the Advent Wreath signals the start of a new Church Year.

Advent Wreaths

- * The circle of evergreens that make an Advent Wreath is symbolic of God's eternal love for us.
- * An Advent Wreath has four candles, usually three violet and one rose. The rose candle is lighted the third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday.



Saint Luke the Evangelist
Iconographer:
Simeon Spiridonov
School: Yaroslavl; 1690

The Lectionary Cycle

Most "mainline" Christian denominations follow a three-year lectionary cycle for Sunday Scripture readings. The first Sunday of Advent we begin not only a new Church Year, but also a new Sunday lectionary cycle.

In Year A, Matthew's Gospel is the main Gospel we hear proclaimed on Sundays during this year.

In Year B, Mark's Gospel is predominant, and Year C is the Year of Luke. John's Gospel is proclaimed at certain times during each year of the three-year cycle.

Spend some time praying with the Gospel for the current Liturgical Year, and also familiarize yourself with all four of the Evangelists' writings.

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The Bishop of Myra

Saint Nicholas, who lived in the 4th century and whose Feast Day we celebrate on December 6th, was the Bishop of Myra, in what is now the country of Turkey. As he became bishop at a very young age, he is often referred to as the “Boy Bishop.” He is also called “Wonderworker” for all of the marvelous deeds he did.

There are many legends about Saint Nicholas. One

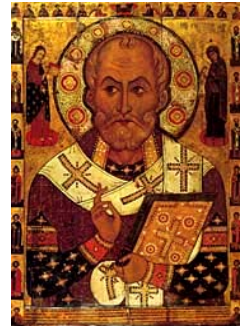
is that he helped a family who was too poor to provide a dowry for their daughters’ weddings by throwing bags of gold into their window at night.

It is also said that Saint Nicholas was present at the Council of Nicaea in 325, and that he was imprisoned because of the stand he took there for the truth of Jesus Christ.

Nicholas is the Patron Saint of many people, such as children,

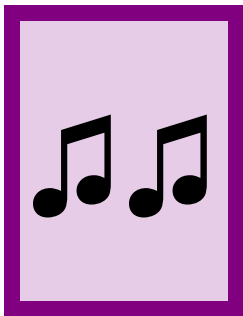
sailors and bankers, and countries including Greece and Russia

One tradition associated with Saint Nicholas is to leave your empty shoe out on the eve of his Feast Day, and when you awaken on December 6th you will find it filled with such things as candy canes (representing his bishop’s crozier, or staff) and tangerines or gold foil wrapped chocolate coins (representing the bags of gold he threw in the window for the young women’s dowry).



Saint Nicholas
with Deisis
Novgorod, 1294

Operation Opera



On December 7th we celebrate the Feast Day of yet another 4th century bishop, Saint Ambrose. While still a catechumen (someone preparing for baptism), Ambrose was chosen bishop of Milan, a city in Italy.

Saint Ambrose is one of the great Church Doctors (teachers). But Christians today may be more familiar with his hymns. Ambrose

was said to have written a number of hymns, including the text of the great Advent hymn, *Veni, Redemptor Gentium* (*Savior of the Nations, Come*).

Opera buffs might be aware of the fact that the opera season at the world famous La Scala Opera House in Milan always opens on December 7th, the Feast of Saint Ambrose, patron of

Milan, Italy. On this day, the streets of Milan are also lined with vendors selling roasted chestnuts.

So keep Saint Ambrose’s Feast Day in a special way. Light a fire, roast some chestnuts, and listen to some opera. And of course, join in singing some of Ambrose’s hymns to the glory of God!

Advent Roses



Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is a central figure in Advent. On December 8th we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Exactly nine months before we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we celebrate that from her very conception, Mary was free from sin.

And four days after we celebrate the Immaculate Conception, we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th. In the year 1531, the Virgin Mary appeared in Mexico to Juan Diego. Mary appeared as a young, pregnant Aztec woman. When the local bishop didn’t believe this vision of Juan Diego, Mary provided a sign—roses in December!

Mary’s image, as she appeared to Juan Diego, miraculously appeared on his tilma. Through the centuries this cloak has remained intact, and is on display above the altar at the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico. We celebrate Saint Juan Diego’s Feast Day on December 9th



Here's...Lucy!

Early in the morning on December 13th, especially in Scandinavian countries, it is common for the oldest daughter in the family to wear a white gown and red sash, with a wreath of candles on her head, and serve coffee and *Lucy Cats* (saffron buns) to the household. It's the Feast Day of Santa Lucia, or Saint Lucy!

Saint Lucy lived in Syracuse on the island of Sicily. Around the year 304, she was martyred at a very young age during a time when the Emperor Diocletian was persecuting Christians.

Still today, we hear Saint Lucy's name mentioned in Eucharistic Prayer I. But few details are known of her actual life. One legend says that during the persecution, Lucy's eyes were plucked out. That is why Saint Lucy is sometimes depicted holding a platter with eyeballs on it!

The Gospel for the Feast of Saint Lucy is Matthew 25:1-13 (The Parable of the Ten Virgins). In this parable, the five wise virgins went out to meet the Lord with their lamps lighted. Perhaps the five candles in the wreath on Lucy's head in this depiction represent those five faithful virgins!

Saint Lucy is the Patron Saint of those who are blind or suffer from eye diseases, as well as the island of Sicily.



Happy Hanukkah!



As we light the candles on our Advent wreaths, and remember Saint Lucy, whose name means *light*, it is good to remember our Jewish brothers and sisters who are preparing to celebrate their Feast of Lights—Hanukkah!

The Hebrew word Hanukkah means *dedication*, and Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by Judas Maccabeus in 165 BCE.

While we light candles on our Advent wreaths marking the four Sundays of Advent, our Jewish brethren light candles on their menorah, marking the

eight days of the Hanukkah Festival.

On the Jewish calendar, Hanukkah begins on the 25th day of the month of Kislev and lasts for eight days and nights.

To find out more about the Maccabees and the Temple, read 1 and 2 Maccabees in the Catholic Bible.



“O” What a Week!

Perhaps one of the best known Advent hymns is “*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.*” This hymn is based on what we call the “O Antiphons”. These seven antiphons call for the coming of Christ, using titles of Christ from prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures. Each antiphon begins with the word “O.”

The O Antiphons are

prayed beginning December 17 through December 23. They are prayed at Vespers, and may be used as the Gospel acclamation at Mass on these days.

These titles of Christ are Wisdom (Sapientia), Lord (Adonai), Root of Jesse (Radix Jesse), Key of David (Clavis David), Radiant Dawn (Oriens), King of

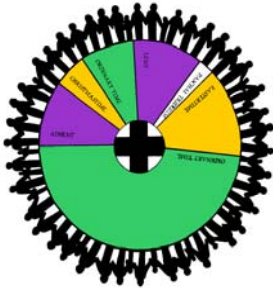
Nations (Rex Gentium), and God-With-Us (Emmanuel).

If you look at the titles in Latin, the initials, taken backwards, spell ERO CRAS, which in Latin means *tomorrow I come*, or *I will be tomorrow*. As we conclude the O Antiphons, the birth of the Lord draws near!



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The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc. (ICF) is a non-profit corporation that assists the faithful – families, catechists, parishes, schools, etc. – with holistic faith formation centered on Jesus Christ revealing himself to us in Word (Scripture), Sacrament, and the Liturgical Calendar. Founded in 2004, the ICF strives to assist Catholic Christians in celebrating and handing on faith in a manner authentic to our Roman Catholic tradition.

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Advent Pilgrims

Las Posadas is Spanish for *lodgings* or *inns*. Recall that in Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, the infant Jesus was laid in a manger because there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn. (Luke 2:7) In many Hispanic cultures, there is a tradition of a novena (nine day prayer) preparing for Christmas. This includes the celebration of Las Posadas. Las Posadas begins on December 16 and concludes on Christmas Eve, December 24.

Las Posadas may involve an entire neighborhood or village. It is a reenactment of Mary and Joseph searching for lodging in Bethlehem, as they awaited the imminent birth of Jesus. Each evening of Las Posadas, those participating process from home to home asking for lodging and hospitality. The participants may be led by two people dressed as Mary and Joseph. Perhaps Mary might even be riding on a donkey! Sometimes two children play the roles of Mary and Joseph, or the participants might carry statues of Mary and Joseph in their procession. The pilgrims are rudely turned away, until finally they find hospitality and are welcomed in! There are traditional songs for the Las Posadas celebration, and luminaria light the way. The home offering hospitality generally has a manger set up. The pilgrims have a small statue of the Christ Child which they place in the manger. Las Posadas ends with the breaking of a piñata, and is usually followed by participants going to church to celebrate Midnight Mass.



Why not have a Las Posadas celebration in your neighborhood this Advent? It's an excellent reminder that we are all pilgrims on a journey, and that we all seek hospitality and are called to offer hospitality to others. In welcoming others, especially those in need, we welcome Christ!