

Views from the Pews: Advent, the season of hope and consolation

"The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come." ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

By long tradition, the season of Advent occupies the last four Sundays leading up to Christmas. Advent begins on the Sunday that falls between November 27th and December 3rd each year), which fell on November 28 this year. The Advent season focuses on expectation and the hope of better times to come through the endless mercy of God, so can be a time of healing and consolation to those suffering grief and loss. The Church recognises that their need is especially acute during the festive season, by holding special "Blue Christmas" services.

The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming," which is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*. Scholars believe that during the 4th and 5th centuries in Spain and Gaul, Advent was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians at the January feast of Epiphany, the celebration of God's incarnation represented by the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus (Matthew 2:1), his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (John 1:29), and his first miracle at Cana (John 2:1). During this season, Christians would spend their days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for this celebration. Hence the liturgical colours we see in front of us are the same as in Lent. Both are seasons of penance and preparation. From Christmas Eve until Epiphany on January 6, the new Christian year begins with the twelve-day celebration of Christmastide.

Originally, there was little connection between Advent and Christmas. By the 6th century, however, Roman Christians had tied Advent to the coming of Christ. But the "coming" they had in mind was not Christ's first coming in the manger in Bethlehem, but his second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world. It was not until the Middle Ages that the Advent season was explicitly linked to Christ's first coming at Christmas. During Advent, we look back upon Christ's first coming in celebration, while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the future coming of his kingdom, The hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" perfectly represents the church's cry during the Advent season:

Kim King via Christianity.com