

## Almsgiving

- **Good old-fashioned alms-giving.** If you gave \$5 away each day, it would cost you about \$150 for the whole season, and what a rich time it would be! Buy the coffee of the person next to you in line, give a five to the person with the cardboard sign, or send a little something to someone special. Generosity as a daily discipline is a challenge that will delight you and those around you.
- **Volunteering.** Donate your time to an organization like the Woodinville Food Bank (which shares space with our church building) or another organization helping those in need.
- **Invite someone over for a meal.** Think of someone you know who may be struggling with loneliness, mental health issues, or another form of personal poverty. Find a time to invite them over for physical and spiritual nourishment.
- **Give to the church's Benevolence Fund.** This is a tangible way of directly caring for those in our parish who may face financial struggles this year.
- **Donate your time for childcare.** Offer to watch a friend or relative's children so they can spend some time connecting with their spouse.
- **Donate items you already have.** Find things in your home (or make something if you are creative) that you can donate to those in greater need.
- **Give up a personal pleasure or comfort.** Pick an item that you would have purchased for yourself in this season, and donate it instead.
- **Help someone with a practical need.** Do you have a skill, talent, or tool that you can use to help someone else? Can you set aside some time to run an errand or complete a house chore for someone in need? Think of those you know who may struggle with tasks you find simple, and find a time to help them in a tangible way.

## Other Practices

- **Advent candles.** An Advent wreath is a beautiful way to mark the Sundays of Advent (and the arrival of Christmas) in your home. Another tradition involves lighting a large candle each day and letting it burn only a marked amount, finally burning it down to the end at Christmas. Yet another tradition involves burning one very small candle each day. All of these practices create a space for contemplation and stillness as we await the coming of the Light of the World.
- **Advent music.** There is such a wealth of music specific to the themes of this season! You can find many playlists online, look through a hymnal for more traditional selections, or perhaps even choose a simple song to sing each evening (*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* and *Creator of the Stars of Night* are great options).
- **Blue/Purple decor.** Blue and purple are the liturgical colors for this season, and color is a wonderful visual reminder to have around the home. You could use some fabric to create a wall hanging or banner, set out a blue/purple tablecloth, or use blue/purple napkins throughout the season.
- **Not-quite-Christmas tree.** If you like to put a Christmas tree up early in December, consider holding off on the festive decorations until Christmas Eve. You could decorate simply with blue or purple, or simply add ornaments slowly throughout the season. You might also consider waiting to put your tree up until Christmas Eve, and enjoying it all through Christmastide!
- **Nativity.** Many homes have a nativity scene or crèche, and it's common to move the characters closer to the manger throughout Advent. Baby Jesus makes his appearance on Christmas Eve, and the wise men arrive at Epiphany!
- **Set an extra place at the table.** This ongoing reminder that we are awaiting the arrival of our Lord helps us to prepare our hearts and our lives for his return.

May God grant you the desire to take the plunge and the determination to stick with it!



# ADVENT ANGLICAN

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Advent

*A Brief Primer to Get You Started*

## What is Advent all About?

Advent is the beginning, the first season of the church calendar. From the Latin *adventus*, meaning “coming”, the full name of the season is The Advent of Christ the King, and indeed it immediately follows the Feast of Christ the King. The church year ends in hope, looking toward Jesus’ eternal reign, then begins again in the posture of waiting. While chocolate calendars on store shelves may give the impression that Advent begins on December 1st each year, the reality is that we mark Advent by Sundays — the day on which we celebrate Jesus’ everlasting presence among us — beginning four Sundays before Christmas and ending at sundown on Christmas Eve.

During Advent, our focus is drawn *backward* to Jesus’ arrival as a baby in the Nativity, and the words of the prophets connect us to Israel awaiting her promised Messiah. At the same time, the lectionary readings of the season point us *forward* to his second coming, and encourage us to prepare ourselves rightly for the King’s arrival.

Awaiting Jesus’ return is our constant posture as Christians. Peter writes in his second letter: “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God” (2 Peter 3:11-12). From the earliest days, Christians have set aside times for special focus on preparation and self-reflection, and Advent is an opportunity to begin the liturgical year with some “spiritual housecleaning”. Taking stock of our habits, longings, and affections allows us to present them to God for reshaping, that we may be formed more deeply into citizens of his Kingdom.

Throughout Advent you will see the colors in many churches shift to purple or blue. Purple, the traditional color of royalty, reminds us of the focus on Christ the King and his imminent return. Blue, a closely related color, also draws our minds to the hope of the dawn breaking through night’s darkness.

There are many way to engage with this liturgical season. Throughout the centuries Christians have commonly structured their focus into three areas: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. Many formative practices fall into these categories, which you can read about more below. It’s also helpful to think of disciplines under the rubric of Engagement and Abstinence. Disciplines of Engagement involve doing something (such as reading a psalm everyday), whereas Disciplines of Abstinence involve not doing something (like fasting from certain foods). Additionally, there are many practices specific to Advent that connect us more specifically to the themes of this season.

The suggestions that follow are exactly that: *suggestions*. The Advent season is a time to take inventory of our lives and our hearts, and to cultivate a greater openness to Jesus. These ideas may give you a starting point, or the Holy Spirit may lead you into other practices toward the same end. If this is new to you, or you’re unsure about how to proceed, consider asking the Lord to guide you in his way through the coming weeks.

Advent blessings to you as you prepare him room this season.

## Ideas for Advent Practices

*“This threefold round of duty, dearly beloved, brings all other virtues into action: it attains to God’s image and likeness and unites us inseparably with the Holy Spirit. Because in prayer, faith remains steadfast; in fasting, life remains innocent; in almsgiving, the mind remains kind.”* —*Leo the Great, c. AD 450*

### Prayer

- **Pray one of the Daily Offices** (Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer, Compline) on your own or with friends or family each day. You can find these in the Book of Common Prayer, online, or in podcast form. You can also pick up a copy of Compline — arranged especially for family use — at the Info Desk.
- **Commit to a daily time of personal prayer.** Many of us pray regularly, but it’s a very different experience to take on prayer as a brief, daily discipline. Choose in advance what you’ll pray, when you’ll do it, and how you’ll do it.
- **Read through the Psalms.** The Book of Psalms has been called the prayer book of Jesus and is a wonderful place from which to frame your own prayers. You might begin a habit of reading a psalm each day, try the 30-day Psalm plan from the Book of Common Prayer, or even try chanting the Psalms for a different way of encountering the text.
- **Try Lectio Divina or contemplative prayer.** Choose a small portion of scripture to read each day (the Gospels are a wonderful starting point) and meditate on it using Lectio Divina or another form of contemplative prayer.
- **Pray with another Christian.** Find a fellow parishioner or another Christian friend and commit to praying for one another throughout Lent (either together or on your own schedules). Check in regularly to ask what they need prayer for and how God is working in their life.
- **Memorize some of the collects from the Book of Common Prayer.** These rich texts provide deep focus and grounding, and are a good antidote to the wandering mind. The collects for Advent are a wonderful place to start!
- **Gratitude.** What if you gave time each day to writing down something you’re grateful for, and then offered a prayer of gratitude to God?

### Fasting

- **Go vegetarian/vegan on Wednesdays and Fridays.** These weekdays are the traditional fasting days in the Church, as we remember Jesus’ betrayal by Judas and his crucifixion. Abstaining from meat or all animal products on these days is a common form of traditional fasting.
- **Forego a food.** Caffeine? Sugar? Meat? Grain? Distinct from a diet, think about a food or drink that is a regular part of your day and would be a challenge to let go of. Give it a try, and you’ll be surprised at the way this shapes your desires and turns you more regularly towards God.
- **Simplify your food choices.** If you enjoy gourmet cooking, fancy ingredients, or elaborate meals, this may be a wonderful time to step into simplicity and see what the Lord does in that space. Perhaps you can limit your seasonings to salt and pepper, or prepare one large pot of soup/stew that you reheat for your meals throughout the week.
- **Give up alcohol.** If you have a healthy relationship to alcohol, abstaining from this celebratory beverage during the season of Advent can be a powerful way to reshape your longings and desires around Jesus and the celebration of His coming kingdom, of which our celebrations here on earth are, even at their best, only a small foreshadowing.
- **Fast from all food until noon, or eat just one full meal in the afternoon/evening.** This is a more vigorous form of fasting, and is best undertaken in fellowship with others, and by those who have a healthy relationship to food.
- **Fast from all food before Communion on Sundays.** While Sunday is indeed a day in which we rest from our disciplines, having Christ’s body and blood be the first thing you consume on the Lord’s Day can powerfully refocus your understanding of what it means to “prepare him room” as you look towards Christmas.
- **Commit to eating a healthy breakfast, or three full meals a day.** Not everyone is in a place to receive the benefits of traditional fasting, and for some the discipline of nourishing and honoring the body, without judgment, may be what the Lord is calling you into for this season.