

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Advent marks the beginning of a new Christian Year. Throughout which we celebrate God walking with us in the here and now of our lives with our daily “ups” and our daily “downs”.

May the year that opens out before us now be a truly blessed one!

Thought for the Week

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves” – Viktor Frankl



Ten things about Advent: Black Friday, the practice imported recently from the US which sees stores slash prices after the Thanksgiving holiday, is set to last until Christmas as retailers struggle for revenue in the face of ever-fiercer competition. Christians have struggled for many years to get people to focus on "the real meaning of Christmas" in the face of an onslaught from consumerism. The pressure to buy lots of things and produce the "perfect Christmas" is overwhelming.

But the Church season of Advent, which leads up to Christmas, isn't about consuming things at all – not even the chocolate in Advent calendars. It's about leading us through some of the great

Christian themes as a preparation for the coming of the Christ-child. So here are 10 things about Advent.

1. It comes from the Latin word "adventus", meaning "coming", which is a translation of the Greek word "parousia".
2. In the early Church, as well as Easter, new Christians were baptized at Epiphany in January. The believers would spend 40 days in penance, prayer and fasting beforehand. Some scholars trace the observance of Advent to this practice – so it didn't have much to do with Christmas at all.
3. The first known mention of Advent is found in the "History of the Franks," which says that in the year 480, St Perpetuus ordered a fast three times a week in the weeks before Christmas.
4. Advent is used to focus our minds on three things: the coming of Christ at Christmas, the coming of Christ into our lives today, and his second coming at the end of time.
5. Many churches use Advent candles and light one every Sunday until Christmas. In some Protestant traditions the first represents the second coming of Christ, the second God's gift of the Bible, the third John the Baptist and the prophets, and the fourth our own calling to shine Christ's light into the world. In Catholic practice one candle represents Mary.
6. A fifth candle is lit on Christmas Day and represents Jesus, the light of the world. In Germany this fifth candle is lit on Christmas Eve, the "Heiligabend" or "Holy Night".
7. Advent hymns include *Lo, he comes with clouds descending*, *O come, O come Emmanuel* and *Hark, the glad sound*.
8. In England in early medieval times people used to carry around an Advent pre-Nativity scene from door to door called an "Advent image" or "vessel cup". It was a box containing representations of Mary and the baby Jesus, decorated with ribbons and apples. It was believed to be unlucky not to see a box before Christmas.
9. In many churches with liturgical traditions there are no flowers during Advent, but there is an Advent wreath. These are made from a circle of evergreen plants like holly and ivy which symbolise that God does not change. The holly is also a symbol of Jesus' crown of thorns.
10. Advent calendars originated in Germany in the late 19th century and soon spread throughout Europe and North America. Originally, the images in Advent calendars were derived from the Old Testament. (*christianity today.com*)



Hanukkah Celebrations

Hanukkah (sometimes transliterated Chanukkah) is a Jewish holiday celebrated for eight days and nights. It starts on the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev, which coincides with late November-late December on the secular calendar. (this year Sunday December 6th and ends Monday December 14th) In Hebrew, the word "hanukkah" means "dedication." The name reminds us that this holiday commemorates the re-dedication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem following the Jewish victory over the Syrian-Greeks in 165 B.C.E.

Every community has its unique Hanukkah traditions, but there are some traditions that are almost universally practiced. They are: lighting the hanukkiyah, spinning the dreidel and eating fried foods.

- Lighting the hanukkiyah: Every year it is customary to commemorate the miracle of the Hanukkah oil by lighting candles on a hanukkiyah. The hanukkiyah is lit every night for eight nights. Learn more about the hanukkiyah in: [What Is a Hanukkiyah? | How to Light the Hanukkah Menorah | Hanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#).

- Spinning the dreidel: A popular Hanukkah game is spinning the dreidel, which is a four-sided top with Hebrew letters written on each side. Read [The Hanukkah Dreidel](#) to learn more

about the dreidel, the meaning of the letters and how to play the game. Gelt, which are chocolate coins covered with tin foil, are part of this game.

- Eating fried foods: Because Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of oil, it is traditional to eat fried foods such as latkes and sufganiyot during the holiday. Latkes are pancakes made out of potatoes and onions, which are fried in oil and then served with applesauce. Sufganiyot (singular: sufganiyah) are jelly-filled donuts that are fried and sometimes dusted with confectioners' sugar before eating.



Advent Wreath Explained The custom of the Advent wreath is an excellent way for families or households and small Christian communities to keep the real meaning of the season central in their Christmas preparations. The four candles of the Advent wreath represent the four weeks of Advent. Three candles are purple in color, a reminder of the spirit of penance and prayer that mark the season. One candle is rose for Gaudete Sunday (third Sunday of Advent), which calls us to "Rejoice in the Lord always." The round wreath symbolizes the eternity of God and the evergreen branches, a reminder of the eternal life of God in Christ, are often used to decorate the



An Advent Reflection:

The best and most satisfying films hold these things together. The genuine sense of risk or adventure allows me to fully engage with the story. But knowing that, somehow, the end will work out enables me to cope with it. I need both a narrative and an eschatology – an engrossing story and a satisfying ending. And that is why Christian eschatology is so important. Knowing how the story will end allows us fully to engage with the story as it is happening now.

Most 'secular' eschatologies are pessimistic in their outlook. Science tells us that we are heading for a 'big crunch', and ecology tells us that we are heading for an environmental catastrophe. Some popular strands of Christian eschatology say something similar, but they are largely misreading what the New Testament says. When Jesus talks of "wars and rumours of wars" in Matthew 24:6, he is not referring to a distant future event, but what is happening in the lifetime of his listeners ("this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened", Matthew 24:34). The four horsemen of the apocalypse (Revelation 6:1–8) are not about sometime future, end-times disaster, but about how the world is now. They are part of the problem to which Christian eschatological hope is the answer.

Consider the epic trilogy that is Peter Jackson's rendering of J R R Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings*. One of the most moving moments in the trilogy comes in the third film. All seems lost. Minas Tirith is under siege; the walls have been breached; orcs are running amok, killing all in their path. The world of men is about to fall. In a brief pause in the fighting, Pippin the hobbit and Gandalf the wizard find themselves on a terrace of the city with a few moments to reflect.

Pippin: I didn't think it would end this way

Gandalf: End? No, the journey does not end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass. And then you see it.

Pippin: What, Gandalf? See what?

Gandalf: White shores...and beyond, a far green country under a swift sunrise.

Pippin: Well, that isn't so bad.

Gandalf: No. No, it isn't.

With hope renewed and vision rekindled, they plunge once again into the fray of battle – and very soon the tide has turned.

As Advent approaches once more, we need to understand the hope that is held out in the prospect of Jesus' return. As we understand that more fully, it neither offers an escape from the world nor a message of gloom for the world. Instead, it gives us the security to engage more fully with the story of the world – including the suffering and tribulation it is now experiencing – so that we can be agents of transformation in the world. (*Rev Dr Ian Paul is Honorary Assistant Professor at the University of Nottingham*)



Advent Calendar with various prayers, reflection, activities to help make each day of advent special available on <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/advent-calendar/>



Make a Visit to the Chapel and Light a Candle

Here people can join in the age old ritual of lighting candles in a church for their own intentions.

As we now bring fire to this
candle-wick, making it glow
with light, may we also bring
the fire of love to this time of prayer and worship.
May this holy candle send forth dancing rays like
sunrise on the most glorious morning, and may
these rays of light encircle us and those we love .
We give you thanks O God,
for this happy moment and
we ask that as we are as one,
in this circle of light, we may always be one with
you in the circle of your loving presence.



Pope Francis Tweet: "Where there is violence and hatred, Christians are called to witness to the God who is Love"