



The Incarnation Seasons at Saint Mark's

The seasons of the Incarnation celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ as a human being. The seasons start with the first Sunday of Advent and continue through the end of the Epiphany season.

There are three distinct seasons of the Incarnation:

Advent: which begins 4 Sundays before Christmas and runs through Christmas Eve.

Christmas: which begins on Christmas Eve and runs through Epiphany (January 6). This is the twelve days of Christmas.

Epiphany: Which begins on the Feast of the Epiphany and runs through Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday).

Advent from the Latin word *adventus* means coming or arrival. The focus of the season of Advent is the anticipation of and preparation for Jesus' return at his second coming. In this season we affirm that Christ has come, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

The Colors of Advent

Traditionally the primary color in the sanctuary for Advent was purple. It is the color of penitence as well as one the colors of royalty.

The other color for royalty by tradition is blue because in ancient times purple and blue were the hardest colors to obtain in cloth making them expensive and fit for royalty.

More recently the emphasis in Advent has moved away from the penitential aspect of the season and has been replaced by an emphasis on hope and anticipation. At Saint Mark's we use the liturgical color of blue in our paraments and vestments.

Evergreens and the Advent Wreath

The Advent Wreath has become a popular symbol for the beginning of the Church year.

The tradition of the Advent wreath pre-dates Christianity. In northern Europe it was the tradition to bring greens into the home in the darkest time of the year when everything seemed to be dying. It was also traditional to form the greens into a circle, to remember the circle of the year and that life and light would return. It was also traditional to add candles to the circle as the days got darker, leading up to the winter solstice, when the days started getting longer.

When Christianity came to northern Europe, the Christians retained the practice and added Christian symbolism to it.

The circle shape of the wreath came to remind us that God is eternal with no beginning and no end. The live evergreens used in the wreath remind us of the hope we have in God and for our eternal life. The candles are the symbol of the light of God coming into the world through the birth of Jesus. The four candles along the wreath itself represents the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent. Here at Saint Mark's we use three blue candles and one pink. In the center of the wreath is the white candle lit on Christmas Eve to signify the birth of the Christ Child. All candles are lit each Sunday through the Feast of the Epiphany.

We light one candle on the first week of Advent, two on the second and so on to remind us of the coming of the light of Christ.

On the third Sunday of Advent, we light the pink candle, because in the Middle Ages, the third Sunday of Advent was a break from the fasting of Advent and a reminder of the joy that was coming with Christ. The Latin word for joy is *gaudium*, so the third Sunday of Advent is called *gaudette* or rejoice Sunday.

On Christmas Eve the final candle, the center white candle, is lit to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

The Flowers of Advent

At Saint Mark's we follow the season of Advent in our choice of greenery and flowers as we adorn the chancel for the four Sundays.

We begin with just evergreens in a simple urn on the first Sunday of Advent. The evergreens again symbolize the hope in God, the hope for newness in our lives and for eternal life.

The second Sunday holly and ivy are added to the urn of evergreens. The holly with its pointed leaf edges and red berries represents the crown of thorns placed on Jesus' head at the time of his crucifixion and the drops of blood that he shed. The ivy is a plant that clings to another plant or wall for its support in order to grow. It is to remind us that God is our support and how we should cling to him daily and in our times of need.

The third Sunday of Advent, we add pink roses to the urn of evergreens to remind us to rejoice, to seek the joy of Christ.

The Star of Bethlehem flower is added to the urn on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Just its name and the shape of its flower denote its use during Advent. The flower is white and is star shaped. The Star of Bethlehem flower is the symbol of hope. The flower reminds us that the Star of Bethlehem guided the Wise men to the Christ Child at his birth.

The Decorations for Christmas

The decorating of Saint Mark's begins on the first Sunday of Advent. Aside from the Advent Wreath and the changing of the liturgical color to blue at the altar, an evergreen wreath will be present in the vestibule. Its presence will help symbolize the new and everlasting life given to us through Christ Jesus.

The nave and the chancel are usually further decorated on After the service on Sunday December 22nd in preparation for our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services.

The paraments on the altar will change to a cream color with inlays of red and gold. The color of the flowers adorning the chancel will also change color. The arrangements in front of the pulpit, lectern and the altar will continue to have evergreens but with flowers in red along with gold; the colors of celebration. Unadorned live evergreen trees will be added. Poinsettias will be present throughout the nave and narthex. These decorations will be present through Feast of Epiphany.

Epiphany

After the Feast of the Epiphany, we move into the Epiphany season which focuses on the spread of the light of Christ through the world. The First Sunday after the Epiphany we use white hangings and hear about the baptism of Christ. After that, the hangings change to green, and we hear about the calling of the disciples and the beginnings of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Take time to look around our church as it prepares to celebrate Christ's birth. From the wreath at the entrance of the church, to the Advent Wreath, the changing of the parament colors at the altar and to all the flowers, allow their symbolism to point you to a deeper understand of Christ's birth, death, resurrection and his second coming.

May you and your family enjoy a blessed Christmas Season

If you wish to explore Advent further please check out these sites.

The Archbishop of Canterbury:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8DWu6HfDaA

The Season of Advent:

www.cresourcei.org/cyadvent.html

The Tradition of Holly & Ivy at Christmas:

<http://cmhypno.hubpages.com/hub/Christmas-Evegreens-The-Tradition-of-Holly-Ivy>

Christian History:

www.christianitytoday.com/ch/thepastinthepresent/storybehind/whychristmastrees

Faith and Worship – Christian Prayers and Resources

www.faithandworship.com/Advent_themes_and_resources.html

