

OCEAN VIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET
Year C - 2021

A DEVOTIONAL BOOK FOR ADVENT

We are again asking members of the congregation and our friends to contribute meditations to help guide the church in its celebration of Advent. Meditations can be reflections on two types of guides. First, there are the weekly Advent themes which we celebrate every Sunday during the season; hope, peace, joy, and love. Second, each day of the week lists passages from the Daily Lectionary (a listing of four passages from the Scriptures). It is expected that your meditation will reflect your own thinking, struggling, and experiences with God's promises in Christ. We also welcome you to provide for consideration any articles, stories, or pictures you may run across and feel would enhance our book.

THE MEANING OF ADVENT

Advent means 'coming' or 'arrival'. In the Western Church Advent has been a period of preparation. We prepare, both for the festival of the Nativity (Jesus' first arrival among us), and for the second coming of Christ (his anticipated second arrival among us in judgment).

The Advent Season has a long tradition in the history of the Christian Church. Its origin can be traced to fifth-century Gaul. It began as a period of six Sundays in which the theme of penitence was stressed. Both with regard to its length and its theme, Advent was patterned on the season of Lent. In Spain, northeast Italy and southern Italy the season was reduced to five Sundays. Eventually, at Rome Advent was reduced from five to four Sundays. In the calendar of the Christian Church today, the season includes the four Sundays preceding Christmas as well as the intervening weekdays. It is the first of the six seasons of the Christian Year. In the Eastern Church the season of Advent is much longer and begins in mid-November.

While Advent, in the past, has been observed in many churches as a time of penitence in preparation for the joyous celebration of Christmas, the emphasis has changed recently to one of anticipation. It calls to mind the four-thousand years of waiting for the coming of the Messiah on the part of the Hebrew people. In many churches today, there is also an emphasis upon the second coming of our Lord. For the Christian Advent not only becomes a time of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ into the world, but also a time for the rebirth of his spirit in our lives.

With this changing emphasis of Advent has also come a change in the color of the season. The color purple, which has been the traditional color for many years, symbolizes penitence. Penitence is not the emphasis in many churches today. The color is often changed to royal blue, symbolizing the sense of expectation. It is designed to call forth anticipation in our hearts – hopeful waiting for the celebration of Christmas once again and for the second coming of our Lord. This new color of Advent also serves to distinguish the season from Lent in our Church Year.

The Advent wreath is traced back to an old Scandinavian custom celebrating the coming of light after a season of darkness. The Christian Church has used it to symbolize the coming of Christ as the Light of the World after four-thousand years of darkness. As the Advent candles are lighted, this truth is symbolized anew in the lives of the worshipers. The circle of evergreen reminds us of the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The candles are usually one pink and three purple, although royal blue is now becoming quite popular. The pink candle is to be lighted on the third Sunday and symbolizes joy. This is based on the Latin word *gaudete* which means rejoice. In the ancient tradition of the Church when fasting was observed throughout Advent, Gaudete Sunday was the one day when a break in this custom could be observed. It also symbolized rejoicing because the coming of the Lord was near at hand.

Regardless of the size of the Advent wreath or the colors of the candles in it, the item of central importance is the Christ candle. This is a large white candle placed in the center of the wreath and lighted on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Though the texts of the Revised Common Lectionary [a lectionary is a list of readings for use in churches for each Sunday] vary from one year to another, there is a great similarity in the themes of the three years during the Advent season. There is a progression in these themes as they guide the worshiper on his/her Advent pilgrimage.