



## Advent: Its meanings and traditions

Advent is the period of four Sundays, and weeks, before Christmas. In Latin, the word means **COMING** and relates to both the first and the future second coming of Jesus. It is a time when we as Christians, prepare for, and remember, the true meaning of Christmas. It is a season the liturgical year, one of preparation and celebration.

There are three aspects of **COMING**: firstly, that wonderful event of around 2000 years ago, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Then he came to be born and live as a man and die for us. Secondly it can mean the coming of Jesus into our lives when we decide to follow him. Thirdly, it foretells the future return of Jesus when he comes, not as a baby, but as King and Judge.

It is unclear when Advent was first celebrated, but back in 567, monks were instructed to fast during December, leading up to Christmas day. In the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic tradition, Advent lasts for 40 days, starting on 15<sup>th</sup> November (also in Celtic Christianity), and is also known as the Nativity Fast. There are other traditions such as not eating meat and dairy during this time, and sometimes not eating olive oil, wine, or fish.

This paints a different picture to modern day Advent, when people are so taken up with buying presents, and way too much food and wine. It is good therefore, to remember how Advent was celebrated in the past with its focus on the spiritual.

One of the great traditions is the singing of Christmas Carols that are Advent Carols such as: *O Come, O come Emmanuel, Come, thou long expected Jesus, and Lo! He comes, with clouds descending.*

Today, most commonly, we count down during the Advent period, with candles and of course, for children, the Advent calendars.

