

Purpose

- To learn about Advent
- To learn the symbols of Advent

Materials

- Bibles
- Handouts

Background Information**ADVENT**

Advent marks the beginning of the Church year (the Christian calendar). It begins four weeks before Christmas. In recent years, Advent has been viewed as forming the first part of the three-part season of Christmas: (1) Advent; (2) Christmas; (3) Epiphany.

From the beginning Advent has been a season of preparation for Christ's coming. When Advent observances first began, Christians living in the West (the western part of the Roman Empire) emphasized preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. Christians in the East stressed preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth. Today, our Scripture readings focus on three comings of Christ in reversed chronological order. (1) His second coming at the end of time; (2) His Messianic Coming, as announced by John the Baptist, to begin His official work as Messiah; (3) His First Coming in Bethlehem, as our newborn King. Featured in each of these three comings is a very important fourth coming, of course, the coming of Christ to each believer? After Christ comes to you through baptism and faith, these three other will mean more to you.

Advent is a marvelous opportunity for spiritual growth. Our Advent Services will, through their hymns, reading, and sermons, highlight the main Scriptural teaching of the season.

During our Advent season our services will highlight the main scriptural teaching of the season. This will be done through hymns, reading and sermons. Also each Sunday a candle will be lit in the Advent wreath. There are four (actually five) candles in this wreath. Three are blue and one is pink. In the center is a tall Christ candle. Each Sunday one candle is lit. On the first Sunday in Advent we have one lit, on the second we have two lit, and so on. The pink is lit on the fourth Sunday. On Christmas Eve the large Christ candle in the middle is lit. Each candle represents something different. The first is hope; the second is peace; the third is joy; and the fourth is love. Traditionally Pastor Todd will give a short meditation to go with each candle to explain its meaning.

On the chancel close to Pastor Todd's chair stands a very tall Christmas tree. This is called the Chrismon tree. This is another of our traditions. This Chrismon tree started as an offering to God. On this one tree we put ornaments that are representative of our Christian faith. The symbols and their meaning are on a handout in this packet. The

Chrismon tree is complete only when those who see it understand its meaning. Several years ago many members of the congregation made these symbols for our tree. They are saved each year and very carefully saved to be used year after year. The attached sheet is a list of the symbols and what they stand for.

Our Worship committee hands out advent meditation booklets on the first Sunday of Advent. These are available for adults and children. This is a daily devotional book. If you spend a few minutes each day on this your Advent season will be filled with spiritual growth and learning. The children's books usually have an activity or a special project for each day. It is fun to do the children's books with the whole family.

There are many very good stories around that show us what we need to do to prepare ourselves for Christ's birthday. This is the legend of the touchstone. This is a good Advent parable for us.

TOUCHSTONE LEGEND

According to the legend, if you found the touchstone on the coast of the Black Sea and held it in your hand, everything you touched would turn to gold. You would recognize the touchstone by its warmth. The other stones would feel cold, but the touchstone would turn warm in your hand.

Once a man sold everything he had, went to the Black Sea, and began picking up stones, hoping to find the touchstone. After some days passed, he realized he was picking up the same stones again and again. So he devised a plan: Pick up a stone; if it's cold, throw it into the sea. This he did for weeks and weeks.

One morning he picked up a stone. It was cold, so he threw it into the sea. He picked up another. It too felt cold, so he threw it into the sea—and so on and so on. Then he picked up yet another stone. It turned warm in his hand; but before he realized what he was doing, he threw it into the sea! He had the touchstone in his hand, and he threw it away. So dulled by the routine, he didn't recognize its specialness. Absentmindedly, he tossed it aside. This can happen to us at Christmastime. If we are not careful, we miss the uniqueness, the power, the sacredness of the season; and before we even realize what we are doing, we throw it away, too it aside.