

The Tradition of Advent

The word “Advent” is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming,” which is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*. Scholars believe that during the 4th and 5th centuries in Spain and Gaul, Advent was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians at the January feast of Epiphany, the celebration of God’s incarnation represented by the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus ([Matthew 2:1](#)), his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist ([John 1:29](#)), and his first miracle at Cana ([John 2:1](#)). During this season of preparation, Christians would spend 40 days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for this celebration; originally, there was little connection between Advent and Christmas.

By the 6th century, however, Roman Christians had tied Advent to the coming of Christ. But the “coming” they had in mind was not Christ’s first coming in the manger in Bethlehem, but his second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world. It was not until the Middle Ages that the Advent season was explicitly linked to Christ’s first coming at Christmas.

(from What Is Advent by Justin Holcomb at [christianity.com](#))

Christianity, like Judaism before it, has enriched the gospel story with traditions and celebrations. Over time those traditions may wax or wane, go through subtle alteration or disappear altogether. As noted here, the concept of Advent has gone through shifts since it began through modern history. Traditions run the gamut from global to personal, from community to family.

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, let’s discuss the following:

1. What are some of the cultural traditions tied to Christmas?
2. What traditions are tied to your church’s celebration of Christmas?
3. Does your family have specific traditions you practice at Christmas?
4. Describe any changes that have occurred in your families traditions over the years.
5. Do traditions enhance the celebration of Christmas?
6. Do traditions mar the celebration of Christmas?