

# Advent is a season of preparation

A period of spiritual preparation begins Nov. 28 when Catholics across the Archdiocese of Baltimore and around the world mark the start of Advent.

From Oakland to Owensville, parishioners will light the first candles of their Advent wreaths and sing familiar seasonal hymns like “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” as they await Christ’s coming on Christmas Day and his Second Coming at the end of time.

Advent also marks the beginning of a new liturgical year in the Latin Church.

Monsignor Stuart Swetland, professor of Christian ethics at Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, said the word “advent” comes from the Latin, “adventus,” which means “coming” or “arrival.” Preparation should be a prayerful and joyful time for believers, he said.

“Even if we buy the most perfect gifts and get all the wrappings right and decorate the most beautiful tree and have all the lights most wonderfully placed in our homes,” Monsignor Swetland said, “it would mean next to nothing if we weren’t actually closer to Christ on Christmas than we are at the beginning of Advent.”

The priest encouraged Catholics to attend the four Sunday Masses of Advent prayerfully and go to daily Mass, if possible. Parishes often offer penance services during Advent and Catholics could also go to confession at other scheduled times.

Lighting Advent wreaths in the home could also be a way of celebrating the season with the entire family, Monsignor Swetland said.

The evergreen wreath symbolizes the everlasting life given by Christ, Monsignor Swetland said. The flame represents Christ as light of the world and the circle symbolizes the long time history awaited Christ’s coming.

The violet candles represent faith, hope and charity, while a rose-colored candle is a symbol of joy and is lit on the third Sunday of the season – “Gaudete Sunday” or “Rejoice Sunday.”

Gaudete Sunday takes its name from the opening antiphon for that day's Mass, "Gaudete in Domino semper," "Rejoice in the Lord always." Priests wear rose-colored vestments on Gaudete Sunday as a symbol of rejoicing that the mid-point of the season has arrived.

Many parishes sponsor "giving trees" or other outreach efforts to raise money or purchase supplies for the poor and vulnerable in their communities.

"Most certainly, part of our preparation must be to be very attentive to see Christ present in the poor around us," Monsignor Swetland said, "especially this year, when so many people are hurting financially - the unemployed, the elderly who are getting by with less and all those hurt by the economic downturn."

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is providing online resources with suggestions for daily prayer, reading, reflection and action. They include a downloadable book of scriptural reflections for Advent and Christmas featuring the words of Pope Benedict XVI from his homilies, speeches and other addresses during his papacy.

The 37-page document includes a Scripture quote and a reflection from the Holy Father for every day of Advent. It is a preview of the upcoming Vatican publication, "A Year with Pope Benedict XVI."

Other resources on the USCCB website include a list of recommended holiday-themed movies, prayers and blessings from the USCCB publication, "Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers." There are also suggestions for remembering the immigrants and the poor throughout the season.

*Visit [www.usccb.org/advent](http://www.usccb.org/advent) for more information.*