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Seven Reasons to Celebrate Advent

By **Ryan Shelton**

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/seven-reasons-to-celebrate-advent>

I grew up in one of the branches of the church that did not celebrate Advent. Before the leftover turkey disappeared from the refrigerator, we were in full-blown Christmastide through December 25.

I was in my twenties before I was introduced to the tradition of Advent, and it frankly did not have much appeal right away. What was the value of four weeks of longing and expectation? It seems so contradictory to the prevailing atmosphere of festive, cheery glow in the shopping malls.

But I have grown to love Advent. And though it is not a mandated observance in Scripture, there are profitable reasons to consider making Advent part of your holiday rhythm. Here are seven potential benefits of observing Advent.

1. Advent reminds us we are not the center of God’s plan.

Advent is an opportunity to refresh your perspective that God has a grand plan for history that is so much larger than just you and your kin. For all the emphasis on gift-giving and sentimentality that characterizes our cultural holiday, we can tend to focus on our small circles of friends. So in the midst of a season that might shrink our gaze, Advent reminds us to pan the camera back out to the larger scope of God’s purposes for history.

Before the foundation of the world, God wrote “the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” (Revelation 13:8), a story culminating in the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride (Revelation 19:7). What a marvel that we are spectacularly *included* in this grand plan, but we are not individually the main characters in this story.

The expectation of Advent points our gaze to a far grander story than our sentimental yuletide inclinations.

2. Advent reminds us of generations of saints longing for the Messiah.

Not long ago, it was a luxury to have two-day shipping for online purchases. Now you can have your purchase show up in just a matter of hours. Do modern people even have a category for longing, pining, and waiting?

Advent gives us an opportunity to imagine the long-awaited coming of the Messiah, who was promised thousands of years before his arrival in Bethlehem (John 8:56; Hebrews 11:13). Generations of saints had promises from God in Scripture, and types that heightened their yearning for the coming One.

As we imagine ourselves in this kind of expectation, we begin to see glimpses of how Jesus expected his disciples to see predictions for his ministry in the entire collection of Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 44), not simply a few isolated prophecies. With this kind of yearning, the pages of the Hebrew Bible rustle with Jesus from Genesis to Chronicles.

3. Advent connects us to centuries of church tradition.

Church tradition is not our final authority like Scripture, but we are not the first generation to seek to live faithfully to God’s word. We are naïve to blindly disregard a practice that has been fruitful for so many citizens of God’s Kingdom.

We should remember our leaders, and consider the outcome of their faith (Hebrews 13:7), and celebrating Advent is an opportunity to imitate the faith of many faithful leaders who have gone before us. We can avoid what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery” by letting the voices of seasoned saints offer wisdom into our context.

4. Advent brings slowness in the midst of a frantic season.

The Christmas holiday, especially in the West, seems to be on a vector towards insanity. Black Friday appears to have no desire to remain confined by a 24-hour window, even while shoppers have literally been reported to stampede retail stores. Students are busy studying for finals, parents are busy shopping for gifts, families are busy traveling to visit relatives — even social calendars can crowd uncomfortably during December.

Advent provides opportunity to slow the pace, or even comparatively grind it to a halt. *Remember the deliberateness of God.* He completed his promise “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4). Whether through

daily readings, candle-lightings, or other Advent-themed traditions, we resolve to pause and reflect in a season that could otherwise drown out reflection — and be still.

5. Advent teaches us patience.

Patience is a fruit of God’s Spirit (Galatians 5:22). But though it is his work, we may seek out means whereby the Spirit of God can cultivate patience in our hearts.

As we observe Advent, God can grow patience in our hearts by demonstrating that *God is patient*, and not because he is slow (2 Peter 3:9). By remembering the longing for Christ’s first coming, we see God’s mercy. He did not rush into swift destruction of his enemies and triumph of his kingdom — glorious as that will be. Every moment of God’s patience is an opportunity for repentance for those who would otherwise be destroyed in his final coming (Romans 2:4). During Advent we behold the patience of Jesus, and by beholding him we are transformed more into his likeness by God’s Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

6. Advent demonstrates the rarer jewel of Christian discontentment.

Puritan author Jeremiah Burroughs wrote of *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. And indeed this rare jewel is worth cultivating, especially in view of a mass conspiracy of advertisements designed solely to rob it from you. But not all discontentment ought to be shunned.

Where Christian contentment is rare in the vast sea of discontented people, distinctly *Christian* discontentment may be rarer. How else can the result of the firstfruits of the Spirit be groaning inwardly (Romans 8:23)? What are we to make of the souls of martyrs under the altar of God crying out, “How long, O Lord?” (Revelation 6:10)? We do not have to look far to find reasons to grow in righteous discontentment with the sin-broken world around us, and lift up holy cries of lament.

Advent uniquely models this in the Christian calendar, as we remember similar cries for the first coming of Christ, and join their refrain for the second coming.

7. Advent fortifies confidence in the promises of God.

Finally, the best application of all of a season of heightened, purposeful remembrance and expectation directs us toward the glorious Second Advent of King Jesus.

As we reflect on God’s faithfulness to his promises past, we are reassured in the promises we yet await. Jesus said he is coming soon (Revelation 22:12), and though our concept of soon may seem to have a different calibration than our Lord’s, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith by tracing the exactitude of God’s faithfulness to the saints long ago. Confidence in the second coming of Christ inspires missions (Matthew 24:14), enables Christian fellowship and mutual encouragement (Hebrews 10:25), and equips us for joyful suffering (Hebrews 10:34).

So if you are like me, and did not grow up with the tradition of Advent in your family or church, consider the benefits to your Christian walk this season by joining many in the Christian faith who have found great benefit in purposefully preparing during Advent for the great celebration of Christmas. Let us join the voices of generations of saints past and present in the refrain, *O come, O come, Emmanuel*.

AND

Why Celebrate Advent?

By Timothy Paul Jones

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-celebrate-advent/>

Once upon a time, there was a season in the church year known as “Advent.” The word comes to us from the Latin for “coming.” The purpose of the season was to anticipate the coming of Christ to earth; it was a season that focused on waiting.

As early as the fourth century AD, Christians fasted during this season and ended their fasts with celebrations either of the arrival of the wise men or of the baptism of Jesus. For many Christians today, the most familiar

sign of Advent is the lighting of candles—two purple candles, followed by a pink and then another purple—on each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas.

Advent has fallen on hard times, though. In the Protestant and free-church traditions, the loss is somewhat understandable; we Baptists in particular tend to be suspicious of anything with origins in ancient or medieval tradition. Yet even in congregations that closely follow the rhythms of the church year, the meaning of Advent seems in danger of being misplaced. By the closing week of November, any sense of waiting has been eclipsed by the nativity scene in the lobby, the tannenbaum in the hall, and the list of Christmas parties in the newsletter.

Awkward Intrusion

Why this displacement of Advent as a distinct season?

Perhaps it's because, for believers no less than nonbelievers, our calendars are dominated not by the venerable rhythms of redemption but by the swifter currents of consumerism and efficiency. The microwave saves us from waiting for soup to simmer on the stove, credit cards redeem us from waiting on a paycheck to make purchases, and this backward extension of the Christmas season liberates us from having to deal with the awkward lull of Advent. And so, before the last unpurchased Halloween costume has made it back to the warehouse, halls and malls are decked with plastic holly and crimson ribbon. Thanksgiving provides a pre-Christmas test run on basting turkeys and tolerating relatives—but the primary function of Thanksgiving increasingly seems to be to supply a convenient time to gather for that spectacle of consumption and consumer debt known as Black Friday.

Why this Advent-free leap from All Hallow's Eve to Christmas Eve?

Perhaps because Christmas is about celebration, and celebrations can be leveraged to move products off shelves. Advent is about waiting, and waiting contributes little to the gross domestic product.

In a religious milieu that has fixated itself on using Jesus to provide seekers with their most convenient lives here and now, Advent is a particularly awkward intrusion. Advent links our hearts with those of ancient prophets who pined for a long-promised Messiah but passed long before his arrival.

In the process, Advent reminds us that we, too, are waiting.

Even on this side of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, there is brokenness in our world no cart full of Black Friday bargains can fix; there is hunger in our souls no plateful of pumpkin custard can fill; there is twistedness in our hearts no terrestrial hand can touch. "The whole creation," the apostle Paul declared, "has been groaning together for redemption" (Rom. 8:22).

In Advent, Christians embrace the groaning, recognizing it not as hopeless whimpering over the paucity of the present moment but as expectant yearning for the divine banquet Jesus is preparing for us. In Advent, the church admits, as poet R. S. Thomas puts it, that "the meaning is in the waiting." And what we await is a final Advent yet to come. Just as the ancient Israelites awaited the coming of the Messiah in flesh, we await the coming of the Messiah in glory. In Advent, believers confess that the infant who drew his first ragged breath between a virgin's knees has yet to speak his final word.

Celebrate the Waiting

I'm not contending that lighting a few pink and purple candles will somehow, in themselves, trigger a renaissance of patience or a yearning for Christ's presence. Neither am I suggesting everyone should dismantle

their yuletide trees and mute every carol until Christmas morning. But I know I need this yearly reminder of the meaningfulness of waiting—and I don't believe I'm alone.

Left to myself, I turn too quickly from the God of the gospel to the gods of efficiency and convenience—false gods who proclaim waiting a waste, a “killing of time.” But Advent reminds me that time is far too precious to be killed, even when that time is spent looking ahead. Advent is a proclamation of the sufficiency of Christ through the discipline of waiting.

So this Advent season, consider how your family might celebrate the discipline of waiting. Set aside a few moments each evening to consider biblical texts that tell about the first and second comings of Jesus. Or select a book for the month—maybe a novel that guides your family to glimpse both the beauty and the brokenness of God's creation—then turn off the television each time and take time to read to one another. Or work together to list some ways the world is broken; then, even as you long for the return of Jesus to make it right, recognize that

God's renovation is already underway. He is making the world new even now through resurrection power among his people; so, plan a family activity that mirrors God's renewing work by setting something right or relieving human suffering in your neighborhood. Whatever you do, let it remind you that, because God has promised to make the world new and has ensured this promise through an empty tomb, no moment of waiting is meaningless. Each passing instant is pregnant with wonder and beauty and glory and joy.

Get the Message

When I recall that there's meaning even in times of waiting, the question that occupies my mind as I stand in line at the supermarket isn't whether I've chosen the quickest line but how I might invest this waiting in something weightier than my own to-do list.

When I sit in traffic, I'm not merely anticipating a shift of color from red to green; I'm awaiting the coming of Christ, and there is meaning in this waiting.

When I walk hand-in-hand with a dawdling child who stands in awe of common robins and random twigs, there is every reason to join her in worship, for there is holiness in her waiting.

“All happenings, great and small, are parables by which God speaks,” observed Malcom Muggeridge. “The art of life is to get the message.” Advent reminds us to listen for the message God is speaking, even in the waiting.