

**“GETTING READY FOR CHRISTMAS”
DECEMBER 2007**

Christmas is coming! Christmas is coming! For some, this realization sparks a sense of joy as they look forward to gatherings with family and friends. For others, however, the approach of December 25th raises their level of anxiety. They stay awake at night wondering how they will ever finish all of the preparations necessary for the nativity season. They worry about decorating the house, buying just the right present, or getting all of those cards mailed out.

Wouldn't it be great to receive help in getting ready for Christmas? For many people, that sounds like a great suggestion. For centuries, Advent has been helping Christians prepare for Christmas. Believers began using the four Sundays before Christmas as a season of preparation. They named this month of preparation “Advent,” which is Latin for “coming” or “arrival.” Christians were inspired by the Old Testament prophets who longed for the coming of the Messiah. These words of Isaiah are read in churches around the world during Advent,

*“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God ...
The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
(Isaiah 40:3,5)*

Isaiah's message is one of anticipation and preparation. He is inspired to speak prophetic words about the long-awaited coming of the Messiah.

How can we prepare our hearts for the celebration of the Messiah's coming? One helpful tool is the use of the Advent wreath. During the four Sundays of Advent, our church, like countless congregations, will light candles in the wreath that symbolize the great themes of Christ's coming. The lighting of these candles will be accompanied by readings from the prophets. We will light four candles which represent Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy. Each of these themes is highlighted in order to prepare ourselves for Christmas. On Christmas Eve, we will light the center Christ candle and sing carols to celebrate his coming.

The custom of celebrating Advent is becoming more popular as Christians find themselves ever more stressed about the approach of Christmas. Believers around the globe feel the need to be spiritually prepared to celebrate Christ's coming. Advent is a way to slow us down and focus our attention. It helps us to get ready.

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