

THE SEASONS: ADVENT-CHRISTMAS

From the Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children

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39. THE SEASON OF ADVENT. The first part of the Advent season extends from the First Sunday of Advent through December 16. The second part extends from December 17 through December 24.

40. The reign of God is already among us but is not yet made manifest in its fullness. As Christians, we celebrate what already is while standing in expectation of what is yet to be revealed. Though we cannot bring about the fullness of God's reign through our efforts alone we can cooperate with God's grace to be ready and vigilant for its advent (coming). The Advent season is one of vigilant waiting but not of Lenten penitence. The first part of the season of Advent directs the eyes of our faith to the fullness yet to be revealed when the Spirit-inspired vision of the prophets, especially Isaiah and John the Baptist, will become full reality. The second part prepares us to celebrate Christ's coming in the flesh at Bethlehem. This sense of vigilance and expectation should not be anticipated by civil, diocesan, parochial, or school celebrations of Christmas during the season of Advent.

41. The Sunday gospels in Advent treat the Lord's coming at the end of time (First Sunday of Advent), John the Baptist (Second and Third Sundays), and the events that immediately prepare for the Lord's birth (Fourth Sunday). The Old Testament readings, especially those from Isaiah, are prophecies about the Messiah and the Messianic age. The readings from the apostles serve as exhortations and as proclamations, in keeping with the different themes of Advent.⁴⁰ ...

42. THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS. This season begins on the Vigil of Christmas and ends with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The inauguration of the fullness we await was at long last disclosed in the incarnation and birth of Jesus (Christmas), born of Mary (Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God), who became a part of a human family (Feast of the Holy Family), was manifested to the nations (Epiphany), and revealed as God's own beloved child (Baptism of the Lord). The Christmas season celebrates the appearance of God among us in the birth, epiphany, and baptism of the Lord Jesus: the beginning of our salvation in Christ.

43. Christmas does not merely celebrate the birth of a child, rather this great feast celebrates the incarnation (birth) of the Lord of history in our world as God's own Word in our very flesh. It is the beginning of the paschal mystery and inevitably leads to his saving passion and resurrection from the dead. The full cycle of Christmas feasts, as surely as the celebration of the Easter Triduum, proclaims that God's "eternal Word has taken upon himself our human weakness."⁴¹

44. This is evident in the Gospel infancy narratives which, rather than being merely stories about the birth of a child, are anticipations of the acceptance and rejection which Jesus would meet throughout his ministry and unto his very death. Therefore Christmas is as integral to an adult understanding of faith as is Easter. Just as the Easter Triduum is one three day celebration of Christ's paschal mystery, so the various feasts of the Christmas season are themselves celebrations of that same mystery made manifest in human history from the first moment of Jesus' birth. It is especially appropriate that the celebration of Christmas be prolonged throughout the Christmas season, rather than anticipating it as is so common in secular culture.

⁴⁰. See *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* no. 93.

⁴¹ *Roman Missal (Sacramentary)*, Preface of Christmas III.