



This is the season to string up Christmas lights, decorate the tree, plan out party menus, and buy gifts at shopping centers where it's close to impossible to find parking. Ladies and gentlemen, the Christmas season is in full effect...**and it's only November!**

Oddly enough, we constantly complain about how fast time flies, but we speed through a whole month to get to the holiday season. The to-do list of things that take over our lives leading up to the Christmas season usually causes more stress and anguish than joy.

Thankfully, the liturgical season of Advent is here to rescue Christmas.

Advent is a time when we can step back from the hectic routine, slow down and contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation. It marks the beginning of a new liturgical year in the Church that slowly builds momentum towards Christmas as the weeks go by. As with all new beginnings, this season is intended to renew our joy, hope, faith and love.

While the rest of the world rushes through to get to Christmas, here's a short video and a few practical ways to help you approach Advent so that, in turn, your heart will be truly ready to rejoice in the birth of our Savior this Christmas.

A few ways to get ready for Advent:

1. Prepare your heart.

Begin preparing for Advent through prayer. Offer your heart as a dwelling place for the Holy family to live in. Ask Jesus, Joseph and Mary to help you live out Advent as a time to prepare and wait for the coming of Jesus' birth.

2. Learn about the season of Advent.

It's important to learn why we celebrate different seasons in the Church. The video can help you understand why Advent is important and how it helps us prepare for Christmas.

3. Make a plan of action.

There are still a few weeks before Advent begins. Make a list of things that need to get done before Christmas that you can complete in the weeks before Advent begins, i.e.- Christmas shopping list, buying gifts, decorating your home, etc. This will free up time during Advent and help you avoid distractions like busy shopping centers that can rob you of time, joy and anticipation of the Christmas season.

4. Set up a space for prayer.

You don't need anything fancy to set up a prayer space. All you need is an Advent wreath. If you don't have an Advent wreath or your budget is limited, you can buy three purple candles and a pink one to light up as the weeks in Advent pass or you can set up a Nativity set without baby Jesus in the manger. You can place the image of the child in the manger on Christmas day before opening gifts.

5. Create an Advent Calendar.

Countdown until Christmas Day by creating a calendar with special quotes or bible verses about hope, faith and love; you can also create or add a random acts of kindness – after all, it's better to give than to receive.

6. Short on time? Look online.

Don't have time to create your own Advent Calendar? You can find Advent Calendars online with great ideas to make the most of out the Advent season. Remember to check back on Catholic-Link.org for more Advent resources.

7. Assign a specific time for prayer and reflection everyday.

A few days before Advent, set up a time for daily prayer. Whether you decide to wake up 10 or 15 minutes before your regular wake up time or assign some other time during the day to pray and reflect, try sticking to the time you've designated for yourself. By doing this you'll have dedicated time on your schedule for prayer and reflection, and you'll begin to grow in discipline.

8. Be present.

Start to eliminate unnecessary distractions and plan on being present during the season of Advent. Limit the time spent on your cell phone, social media and computer. Increase the time you spend with family and friends by doing things you enjoy together. Plan a movie night; bake cookies together; host a game night; enjoy a cup of hot cocoa together... anything that will help you spend time together enjoying each other's company.

9. Reflection night.

Before Advent begins, pick a date to invite family and friends to an Advent reflection night. Provide the day's readings, meditation and music to guide prayer and reflection.

10. Don't forget those in need.

Jesus came to serve, so following in his footsteps we should consider how we could serve our brothers and sisters in need. November and December are some of the busiest times for volunteer centers. If you can't find a place to serve in person, you can always make and send cards to those in hospitals or in nursing homes. Many times patients in the hospital or the elderly in nursing homes are happy to receive cards from people who are thinking of them.

11. Find out if your local parish is hosting an Advent Mission

Plan on attending an Advent Mission. Many parishes host Advent Missions. Some missions are hosted on a single night, others last a week but all have one thing in common: to bring the body of Christ together to learn and grow in the love of Christ as we await the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior.