

Expect the unexpected series

Father Allen Waller

What is Advent? It is the English translation of the Latin word which means “Coming” – not just marking the first coming of Christ, but more important, awaiting his second coming in glory.

For us Advent is a season of the church’s year - a season of heightened expectation leading up to us celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

Before becoming a Christian, I’d heard of Lent – but Advent was not something I’d heard much about. It got ignored between the hustle and bustle of:

- Buying gifts
- Putting up decorations
- Finishing up the semester strong
- Going to numerous Christmas parties and gatherings.

Interestingly, given what Advent is (and has been observed over the centuries), it’s interesting to me how most modern Christians seem to blend historic Church traditions surrounding Advent with (what I’d call) Victorian cultural traditions.

What marked Advent historically? Well, over the centuries Advent was marked by:

- A time of penitence
- A time of fasting
- A midnight service (Christmas vigil)
- Singing the ‘O Antiphons’
- Giving special alms to the poor

We started to see a shift during the Victorian period. Many attribute the change specifically to Queen Victoria, and her husband German-born Prince Albert that introduced some of the most prominent aspects of Christmas. This is when many of the Traditions we Americans cherish began to take root:

- Christmas trees
- Carol singing
- Advent calendars
- Exchanging gifts
- Wintery set pieces and the like



Children on Victorian Christmas



Victorian Christmas carol



The night before Christmas, 1898



Victorian Christmas Carol Singing



German Protestants began to mark the days of Advent either by burning a candle for the day or, more simply, marking walls or doors with a line of chalk each day. A new practice of hanging a devotional image every day ultimately led to the creation of the first known handmade wooden Advent calendar in 1851.



Victorian Christmas tree with flags and paper cones for candies or nuts on it, ca. late 1840s



Victorian Christmas shopping

Generally, this is not a problem; however, I fear it does mean we come to Advent not necessarily with an expectation to be challenged to grow in faith during this time of year (perhaps like we do during Lent). Instead, what many of us expect, is to bask in the comfortable and familiar. In other words, we come to expect what's expected.

For this reason, we're going to be looking over the next four weeks through a series of sermons with the title: **Expect the unexpected**. If you miss one, you can listen to it on our website: www.StTimothysChurch.org



A MYSTERY IS HARD TO ENTER SOMETIMES...

Source: adapted from *The Godly Play, First Sunday of Advent*

The kids in Pre-K through 5th grade who attend Godly Play (Sundays at 9:30am in the Rector's old office) are also learning about Advent. We are sharing with you so you can talk to your children at home!

We all know the Advent color is purple, because the altar is purple, and Father Allen is wearing purple. Purple is the color of kings and queens. No one would wear purple in older days except royal people. Roman citizens would wear a little stripe of purple, but that was all. Purple is a serious color, and something serious is about to happen. *A king is coming, but he is not the kind of king that people thought was coming. This King had no army, no great house and no riches.* This King was a baby who was born in a barn.

Blue is also the color of getting ready.

It is the color of the sky just before dawn. Blue is also the color of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is about to have a baby. But this will be a very special baby. *This King had no army, no great house and no riches. This King was a baby who was born in a barn. The King who was coming is still coming.*

This is full of mystery. You know, a mystery is hard to enter sometimes. That is why this time of Advent is so important. Sometimes people can walk right through a mystery and not even know it is there.

This time of year you will see people hurrying in the shops buying things and doing this and that, but they will miss the Mystery. They don't know how to get ready or maybe they just forgot.

The Church learned a long time ago

that people need a way to get ready to enter or even come close to a mystery like Christmas. The Church set aside four weeks to get ready. This is such a great Mystery that it takes that long to get ready. During this time, we are all on the way to Bethlehem.

We are all making the journey. Jesus tells us in the Gospel today to "Stay awake and always be ready". We are all getting ready to enter the Mystery of Christmas, so let's go with the prophets, the Holy Family, the shepherds, the angels, the Magi and all the rest to make the journey that was not just back then. It is also now.

Godly Play is a **Montessori**-based program which encourages children to think about faith and God on their own and encourages them to ask questions to build a strong and personal relationship with God.