

The Symbols and Traditions of Advent

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Introduction

Advent prepares us for Christmas, which is all about the Incarnation—God joining us, taking on human flesh, actually becoming human. All of creation is touched in the Incarnation. Catholics believe that creation, though wounded by original sin, remains an indicator of the presence of God in the world.

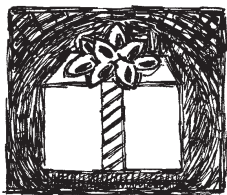
Through our use of sacraments and sacramentals we witness to our belief that creation can lead us closer to God. We use

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natural elements and objects, such as water, bread, wine, oil, candles, statues, stained glass windows, and beads (to mention just a few) to help us focus and celebrate our relationship with God. During the season of Advent, many of these natural elements and objects assist us in preparing for the birth of Christ. We will look at the signs and symbols that our Church uses during this season, as well as some that come from our cultural inheritances.

The giving tree



The giving tree is a variation of the Jesse tree. Church communities sponsor a tree decorated with tags indicating gifts for children in need at Christmas. Clothing sizes and ages are connected with the requests on the tree so that the parishioner taking the tag can easily get the needed item and return the gift to the parish church by a designated date. The gifts are then distributed to the children before Christmas. The giving tree unites us to the great message Jesus continues to give us at Christmas: “What you do to the least of these, you do to me” (see Matthew 25:40). We practice this teaching by reaching out to the brothers and sisters of Jesus who are in need—during Advent, at Christmas, and all year long.