



## Liturgical Notes on Advent, Christmas & Epiphany

Prepared by the Bishop's Liturgical Advisory Panel  
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These notes are the first in a series of “evergreen” documents that will be prepared by the Bishop's Liturgical Advisory Panel. As the liturgical year unfolds, the panel will offer notes on these groups of seasons: 1) Advent, Christmas and Epiphany; 2) Lent and Holy Week; 3) Easter to Pentecost; 4) Sundays after Pentecost (including Creation Season). The notes will be approved by our Bishop, and are intended to assist parish clergy by providing guidelines and encouraging creativity as we mark time as a diocesan church.

### ADVENT

Each year parishes observe the liturgical season of Advent by making adjustments to the pattern of Sunday worship familiar in the season after Pentecost.

The unique tone of the season is created by a number of different elements: the use of purple or blue hangings and vestments; the singing of Advent hymns; the omission of the ‘Glory to God’; using the Trisagion (instead of the Kyrie); the option of using Eucharistic Prayer #3 with the Advent preface; and the Advent form of the Prayers of the People found on page 119 of the *Book of Alternative Services*. This litany is best sung to the chant on page 917. Urgent petitions can be added prior to the litany with the familiar formulae ‘I ask your prayers for...’.

Some of these suggestions can be found in *McCausland's Order of Divine Service* as well as elsewhere, including the *BAS*. However, it is noted in *McCausland's* itself that this publication has no authoritative status in the Anglican Church of Canada. Its essays and comments reflect the opinion of that year's author and editor, which can at times conflict with widely accepted Anglican custom. As it indicates in its explanatory ‘General Remarks on using the Ordo for the BAS’, the resource should be used selectively, guided by a familiarity with the essays, explanatory notes and rubrics of the *Book of Alternative Services* as well as an understanding of Anglican liturgy as a whole.

### Advent Wreaths

Some parishes have a robust custom of Advent wreath candle-lighting during the Sunday liturgy, with people eager to participate in the rite. If this is the case remember it is the light shed by the candles that is the liturgical symbol, so it does not matter what

colour the candles are. Seek to find a simple sentence or two to be read at the time of candle-lighting that avoids allegorizing a particular colour scheme while also highlighting an appropriate seasonal theme.

However, if the custom shows signs of faltering (i.e., it becomes difficult to find people to light the candles and/or proclaim the readings), simply light the appropriate number of candles prior to the start of the liturgy.

The quiet simplification of a rite that can feel overly complicated can be a relief to the congregation. The custom itself will be appreciated as meaningful contribution to the Advent liturgy while not overshadowing either the Gathering of the Community or the Proclamation of the Word.

Ideally, the wreath should be placed near the lectern or in some other visible place, noting that it should never be placed where it dominates or obscures the altar.

In addition, it can be helpful to highlight the domestic nature of the Advent Wreath, providing online links to where a wreath can be purchased for use at home. Alternately, a notice in the bulletin in mid-November could inspire people to mark the season at home in a simple way:

*Consider making an Advent Wreath for your home to mark the four weeks of Advent. All you need are five candles of any colour - four arranged in a circle and the fifth in the centre. Light one candle during the first week of Advent, two during the second week, et cetera. Light just the centre candle from Christmas Eve until January 6. Note: It is perfectly acceptable to replace candles if they burn out.*

### **Avoiding 'Christmas Creep' In Advent**

Most clergy know this is easier said than done. It is important for clergy to acknowledge the cultural pressures that surround parishes, and exercise judicious restraint in imposing significant changes to parish customs.

That being said, the gift of Advent is its sense of quiet anticipation and spiritual longing that is quite different than our culture's focus on material goods. In the midst of competing values, it is important to use one's best pastoral judgement, perhaps taking a similar approach to that of the Advent wreath cited above. Be aware that complex church decorating schemes can be simplified or even cease when key lay leaders are no longer available to ensure they are carried out.

Certainly, given how short the Christmas season is, having a Christmas tree in the worship space is not ideal. When Christmas decorations in Advent are deemed to be unavoidable, the use of natural rather than artificial greenery and perhaps handmade ornaments rather than commercial ones are preferable.

In order to accommodate the scheduling needs of young families, sometimes a Christmas pageant is held far in advance of December 24. If that is the case, it does not thereby give license to introduce Christmas carols during subsequent liturgies, even if carols are sung during the pageant.

Also, it is important to note that a Christmas pageant is not a substitute for a homily, although clearly such homilies need to be very brief and child-focused.

An Advent Lessons and Carols, as outlined in General Synod's *Occasional Celebrations*, is a good option for a Service of the Word held prior to Christmas. Once in the Christmas season, a Christmas Lessons and Carols provides a festive way to celebrate a Service of the Word.

### CHRISTMAS, EPIPHANY & THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Note the guidance regarding the scheduling of Sundays after Christmas, Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord and the Presentation of the Lord on pages 15-17 as well as pages 276-280 of the *Book of Alternative Services*.

Some parishes assemble a creche or manger scene each year at Christmas, either outside or within the church. This or a similar blessing could be used:

*God of every nation and people, from the beginning of creation you have made manifest your love: when our need for a Saviour was great you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy and love. Bless this manger and all who look upon it; may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise our thoughts to him, who is God-with-us and Saviour of all, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.*

It is appropriate to celebrate baptisms or the renewal of baptismal vows on the Baptism of the Lord, always held on the Sunday after January 6.

Many congregations mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on the Sunday between January 18-25 although it can also be observed at other times of the year. Whenever it occurs, it is appropriate to acknowledge the theme of the week during the Prayers of the People.

It is the custom in some parishes to begin the celebration of the Presentation of the Lord with a candlelit procession. If it is desirable to bless candles for use at home it is appropriate to do this either before the procession or at the time of the Prayers of the People.