



**Mission of the Cross
Lutheran Church-
LCMS**

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Mission of the Cross Lutheran Church is a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) serving people in the Brainerd Lakes area of Minnesota. We are a confessional and liturgical congregation called, gathered, and strengthened by Christ's Word and Sacraments. We are Biblical in doctrine and observe the historic liturgy of the Western Church which is notable for its dignity and reverence.



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The Origin and Purpose of Advent

In his book, *Gathered Guests*, Timothy Maschke writes, "The present calendar of the church begins with Advent (from the Latin *adventus* which means 'coming'). During this season, Christians throughout the world prepare for Christmas....Advent seems to have been established by A.D. 550, though practices varied across Europe for centuries thereafter. Apparently originating in fifth-century Gaul, Advent was first celebrated over a six-week period. The four-week season was officially established by Pope Gregory the Great (pope from A.D. 590-604) and was considered a joyful festival season (during which the vestments and paraments were white). Only a century or so later, however, the theological emphasis shifted toward an anticipation of Christ's second coming, and the theme of preparation began to dominate the church's thinking. A short time later, the penitential nature of the season became central to the worship activities of Advent." (p. 53-54)

The Preparation of Advent

Advent prepares our hearts to celebrate Christmas, but it does so in a way that we might not expect. The Church doesn't mix Advent and Christmas together. The Church doesn't let Christmas creep into Advent. In fact, the Gospel lessons for the Sundays of Advent don't seem to have much of anything to do with the Nativity of our Lord.

The First Sunday of Advent gives us the Triumphal Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-9). We will hear the same event on Palm Sunday, when it seems much more fitting to us. The Second Sunday of Advent doesn't speak at all about our Lord's incarnation or his first coming in lowliness to fulfill the law for us and die for our sins on the cross. Instead, it teaches us to be ready for his second coming in power and might to judge the living and the dead (Luke 21:25-33). The Third Sunday of Advent gives us John the Baptist in prison sending his disciples to Jesus to inquire whether he is the promised Christ or not (Matthew 11:2-10). Finally, the Fourth Sunday of Advent has people asking whether John is the Christ and why he is baptizing if he isn't him (John 1:19b-28).

This preparation for Christmas might seem strange to us, because it doesn't seem very much like Christmas. On the other hand, we don't expect Lent to be like Easter. Instead, we might take issue with Lent not being enough like Holy Week, especially Good Friday. Each Sunday in Lent isn't really about that even though we always have it in view. The season is preparatory and catechetical, but the themes of Holy Week aren't extended throughout Lent. Lent is allowed to exist

as liturgically and thematically distinct. It isn't an extension of Holy Week, but preparation for it by teaching us about temptation, repentance, faith, and intensifying the struggle against sin.

Similarly, Advent is a penitential season that prepares us to celebrate Christmas by teaching us that our King has come from heaven and was born to die for our sins (Advent I), that on account of his death in his first coming, we don't have to be afraid of his second coming in judgement, but we do need to be ready for it (Advent II). Advent teaches we can be confident that Jesus is the Christ because he did the signs that the prophets said the Christ would do (Advent III), and that having been baptized into Jesus, we have the promise of eternal life and comfort even for the days when we suffer in this world (Advent IV). Then, having been carefully prepared throughout Advent, we celebrate with gladness the birth of our Lord and the salvation that has come down from heaven.

Latin Names for the Sundays of Advent

The Sundays in Advent and Lent have Latin names. These names almost always come from the first words of the introit. For example, the Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete which means "rejoice." This comes from Psalm 85:1, "Rejoice, in the Lord always." The reason Sundays are named this way is because the introit was the beginning of the Divine Service historically. There was no corporate confession and absolution, so the chanting of the introit was the first word. The Sundays became known by this first word in much the same way our hymns get their names from their first lines. For the same reason, the Lord's Prayer is sometimes also called the "Our Father."

The Christmas Vigil

There are two ways to determine the beginning of the season of Advent. One is to find the fourth Sunday before Christmas. The other method is to locate the Sunday closest to the Feast of St. Andrew, which is celebrated on November 30th. Thus, Advent always begins on a Sunday between November 27th and December 3rd and concludes on December 24th.

This year with Advent beginning on December 3rd we have an unusual occurrence with Christmas Eve falling on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. This has resulted in liturgical confusion among pastors and laity alike. Some have suggested that on Sunday, December 24th we should celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Advent in the morning and observe Christmas Eve in the evening. This seems to make sense, but it isn't liturgically correct. It also isn't a sin, and so we shouldn't condemn anyone over it, either. This well-intentioned practical solution would allow us to observe both the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve on the same day.

The liturgical experts with the Lutheran Missile Project and Gottesdienst have written about what was done historically when Christmas Eve falls on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. They suggest that the Christmas Vigil, also known as Christmas Eve, be observed in the morning of December 24th. This might seem especially odd to us since "eve" seems to mean evening, but Christmas Eve is an entire day. However, since it is still Advent, the color of the day is still violet, or blue in our case. The Gloria in Excelsis will not be sung and we will sing Advent hymns. Then, when we gather in the evening, we will sing the Gloria and Christmas hymns and hear the readings assigned for Christmas Midnight rather than Christmas Eve.

Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is a tradition about 500 years old that probably originated among German Lutherans before spreading to Christians of other regions and confessions. In recent years some have tried to attach significance to each candle, but I don't find it that helpful, especially given the novelty of such explanations. There is no consensus about the meaning of individual candles, and this distracts a bit from the original purpose of the Advent wreath. Paul Lang in his book "*Ceremony and Celebration*" wrote, "As before the birth of Christ the light of prophecy concerning his advent and his redemptive work became brighter and brighter, so the nearer we come in the church year to the feast of his nativity the greater the amount of light from the Advent wreath." (p. 158)

The Advent wreath has a number of variations, but there is nothing inherently right or wrong about them. On the other hand, most still have preferences about which one is most practical and helpful for teaching. Some versions of the wreath include a smaller candle for each day of Advent and a larger candle for each Sunday, but we are largely used to a wreath that has four candles (one for each Sunday of Advent) or five candles (with the fifth candle being lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day). I like the idea of a candle for each day, but it seems a bit impractical considering the space needed for that many candles and time needed to light them and put them out.

In my opinion, it is better for the Advent wreath to have four and not five candles, since it is an Advent wreath and its purpose is to help us anticipate Christmas. Everything else associated with Advent goes away on Christmas, and I'd suggest we do the same with the Advent wreath. I'd also suggest that three of the candles on the wreath be violet and not blue since violet is the traditional color for Advent. It is the color of royal mourning, a mix of purple and black.

The other candle is rose (not pink) and is lit beginning on *Gaudete*, the Third Sunday of Advent. *Gaudete* means rejoice. Rose isn't just the color of the candle. It is the liturgical color for the day. Some congregations have rose paraments and vestments for this Sunday and *Laetare*, the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Rose is a color of joy, meant to call to mind the springing flowers from the earth and buds upon the trees. It is also a lighter shade of violet. Rose is violet, but with the black and blues removed from it. This signifies that our mourning is lightened by the expectation of Christ's second coming and that our sorrows here are temporary. The color is rose, but not yet the full on white or even gold of Christmas and Easter. The joy of *Gaudete* is anticipatory, celebrated in the midst of the sadness we have in this world. Christmas and Easter are the Church Militant at its full joy and exclamation. But soon that too will pale and our real day, the day that Advent eagerly awaits, will come. The angels will sing, full-throated, not just to shepherds on the outskirts of Bethlehem, but to all creation, as every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Schedule of Divine Liturgies for December

December 3	Ad Te Levavi (Advent I)	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
December 6	Commemoration of St. Nicholas	6:00 p.m.	Vespers
December 10	Populus Zion (Advent II)	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
December 13	Commemoration of St. Lucia	6:00 p.m.	Vespers
December 17	Gaudete (Advent III)	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
December 20	Commemoration of St. Katharina	6:00 p.m.	Vespers
December 24	Christmas Vigil	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
December 24	Christmas Midnight (observed)	4:30 p.m.	Divine Service
December 25	Christmas Day	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
December 31	First Sunday after Christmas	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service

Birthdays, Baptisms, Confirmations, and Anniversaries

December 5	Tiffany Bosaaen	Birthday
December 7	Donald Middlestadt	Baptism
December 7	Mark and Debra Wessel	Anniversary
December 15	Scott Blake	Baptism
December 15	Marion Trees	Confirmation
December 23	Grace Werner	Birthday
December 23	Sandi Porter	Baptism
December 25	Dave Tiegen	Baptism
December 26	Phil Diedrich	Birthday
December 27	Colleen Marquardt	Birthday
December 28	George and Arlyne Selvestra	Anniversary
December 28	Bobbi Blake	Birthday

35 for 35 Campaign

At our last voter's meeting we approved a \$35,000 fundraising campaign as we prepare to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Mission of the Cross Lutheran Church. The funds raised will be used to repair the parking lot and purchase new paraments, vestments, banners, communion vessels, a paschal candle, and processional crucifix that will match the large crucifix already in the sanctuary. We have already received \$10,000. You can see our progress and find more information on the bulletin board in the fellowship hall.

Justification: Am I Good Enough For God?

Earlier this year pastor and the elders attended a retreat and training workshop led by Rev. Rolf Preus. He mentioned a short book on the doctrine of justification that he wrote several years ago. Please make sure to get your copy, so you can enjoy reading it soon.

Bible Studies

In January on Sunday mornings we are going to continue our study of 1 Corinthians. On Wednesday afternoons at Whitefish we will begin a study of the book of Revelation. On Wednesday evenings we will continue to study Bible stories that are coordinated with Luther's sermons in the Large Catechism.