

The season called *Advent*

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As early as the 5th century AD, the Christian Church set aside the weeks leading up to Christmas and called this the season of Advent. This year, the season of Advent begins on December 3 (this Sunday). The word *advent* means 'coming' or 'arrival.' This is a holy (set-apart) time of the year when we remember the 'coming of God' into our world. The season of Advent is about Christmas and the birth of Jesus, but that is not all. It is also about anticipating the *next* coming of God.

The first arrival, the first 'advent,' was the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. On that day, God entered into his creation in an unprecedented way. He joined himself with us. In his life and ministry, Jesus was *Emmanuel*, God-with-us. In this man, God participated in our joy and our sorrow – even our death. This was the beginning of something new, a change in the very fabric of the universe. "The kingdom of God has come near to you," Jesus would say to his students. We remember this first 'arrival' in the season of Advent.

But that's only half of the story. Eventually Jesus' ministry on earth came to an end – a horrible end. He was killed by the government. The God who came near to us was beaten and rejected and sent away.

If Advent means just 'thinking about the birth of Jesus' then we are in a hopeless situation indeed. Because Jesus is gone, and it looks like the kingdom of God has not yet taken over this world. But there *is* hope for something more than this. In the season of Advent, we also look forward to the coming of God in the *future*. The sorrow and death of our world does not have the last word. We believe this for one reason only: the Jesus who died was given back his life. Just as God was able to create something new out of the death of one man, so he will create something new out of the death of this world. The future will be *different* from the past and the present. We will be *raised*, and **God's kingdom will come**. This is the Christian hope.

In this time of Advent, let us remember with gratitude the first arrival of God. And let our lives and our actions be rooted in a deep trust that this God is coming again.