

THE TIME OF CHRISTMAS

Advent

*Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lowly exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!
(Christian Worship 23:1)*

Advent means “coming,” and in this season, we prepare for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ. John the Baptist prepares the way: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 3:2) Therefore, the season has a penitential spirit. We recognize that we are sinners—in bondage to guilt and death, exiled from God’s love. We are not worthy to have our Lord come to us.

*“Comfort, comfort all my people; speak of peace,” so says our God.
“Comfort those who sit in darkness, groaning from their sorrow’s load.
Speak to all Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
Tell them that their sins I cover, that their warfare now is over.”
(Christian Worship 11:1)*

We acknowledge our sin, yet, we are confident that our Lord is merciful and will forgive us. We delight to hear the words of Isaiah, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that he sin has been paid for...” (Isaiah 40:1,2) We repent of our sin, eager to celebrate the coming Savior who takes away sin and, therefore, God’s wrath. Through Jesus, we have peace with God now and forever.

*Jesus, your Church with longing eyes for your expected coming waits.
When will the promised light arise and glory beam from heaven’s gates?

Teach us in watchfulness and prayer to wait for your appointed hour,
And fit us by your grace to share the triumphs of your conquering power.
(Christian Worship 9:1,5)*

Advent season does not merely anticipate Jesus’ first coming at Christmas, but especially Jesus’ second coming when he will finally deliver us from evil forever.

The season of Advent includes the four Sundays before Christmas Day. Good Shepherd also offers Advent Vespers on the Wednesdays in Advent.

Christmas

A great and mighty wonder, a glorious mystery:

The virgin bears the infant who veils his Deity.

Repeat the hymn again:

“To God on high be glory, and peace on earth to men.”

(Christian Worship 36:1)

Christians have been singing this hymn for since the 7th century AD. For over two millennia, Christians have been marveling at God’s fulfillment of his promise that he would send a Savior to this world. We rejoice, for at Christmas, God the Father so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. (John 3:16)

The Word becomes incarnate, and yet remains on high,

And cherubim sing anthems to shepherds from the sky.

Repeat the hymn again:

“To God on high be glory, and peace on earth to men.”

(Christian Worship 36:2)

It is a great and mighty wonder that the one who comes to save us is God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14) God has become man to redeem all mankind—a glorious mystery!

Oh, that birth forever blessed when the virgin, full of grace,

By the Holy Ghost conceiving, bore the Savior of our race,

And the babe, the world’s Redeemer, first revealed his sacred face

Evermore and evermore. (Christian Worship 35:2)

The Church celebrates Christmas from December 25 to January 5, twelve days.

Epiphany

Arise and shine in splendor; let night to day surrender.

Your light is drawing near.

Above the day is beaming, in matchless beauty gleaming;

The glory of the Lord is here. (Christian Worship 81:1)

The word Epiphany means “appearing, or revelation.” Throughout the season of Epiphany, Jesus is revealed as true God. He is worshiped as God by the Gentiles who bestow gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh upon him.

The wiser Magi saw from far and followed on his guiding star,

And, led by light, to Light they pressed and by their gifts their God confessed.

(Christian Worship 91:2)

He is declared to be God by his Father who identifies him at his baptism: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) Jesus reveals himself to be God through miraculous signs and by driving out demons. Finally, in the presence of Peter, James, and John, Jesus manifested his Divinity, being transfigured in radiant glory and speaking with the sainted prophets Moses and Elijah.

With shining face and bright array Christ deigns to manifest today

What glory shall be theirs above who trust in his atoning love.

(Christian Worship 96:3)

Epiphany is January 6. The Sundays that follow are the Sundays after Epiphany. The final Sunday of the season of Epiphany is the Transfiguration of our Lord.