



The varied ways to prepare for Christmas

In Australia we are so familiar with the term Advent – the period in which the Roman Catholic Church prepares for Christmas. This of course starts four weeks before Christmas. Yet did you know that other Churches have another term for this and prepare in a different way?

The Maronite Catholic Church commences its Christmas preparations at the beginning of November with the Dedication and Renewal of the Church. From there begins the official Season of Advent, termed the 'Season of the Birth of Our Lord,' in the Maronite Church.

Advent derives from the Latin *adventus* (going before), indicating that the spirit of Advent is about pointing towards Christ's return and as John the Baptist cries out, a time to 'Prepare the way of the Lord.' The *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* states: <http://www.catholicliturgy.com/texts/calendar.txt>

Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation (no 39).

Therefore in Advent, each Sunday gospel reading has a distinctive theme. Basically it follows as such:

- First Sunday - Recalls the Lord's coming at the end of the time
- Second Sunday - Focus on John the Baptist
- Third Sunday - Focus on John the Baptist
- Fourth Sunday - The events that prepared immediately for the Lord's birth

The Maronite Lectionary is in contrast. The Season of the Glorious Birth of the Lord commences immediately after the Renewal and Consecration of the Church. The Sunday Gospel passages recount week by week, the announcements leading up to the Birth of Christ. They are listed below:

- Announcement to Zechariah – Lk 1:1-25
- Announcement to Mary – Lk 1:26-38
- Visitation of Mary – Lk 1:39-45
- Birth of John the Baptist – Lk 1:57-66
- Revelation to Joseph – Mt 1:18-25
- Genealogy of Jesus – Mt 1:1-17
- Birth of the Lord – Lk 2:1-20

So as you prepare for the coming of the Lord, remember there are numerous Gospel passages that offer deep and rich reflection on the why and how of Jesus' coming and what it means for us.

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