

CHRISTMAS

Inspire (for parents)

I felt as if I was 11 months pregnant, but I was only 11 days past my due date. The anticipation was mounting with each passing day. Our extended family awaited the arrival of our first child, continually asking, "Why isn't that baby here yet?" With a deep sigh, I would reply, "I guess he is not ready to enter this world. God knows when the time is right, and if I trust God, the baby will be right on time!" Two days later, our baby boy was born. God's timing is perfect.

Advent is a meaningful reminder of God's perfect timing. When the time was right, God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ, entered this world as a baby. Each year, our children looked forward to hanging the Advent calendar and counting down the days to Jesus' birthday. Inevitably, one of the boys would ask, "Isn't Jesus' birthday here yet?" Waiting was very

difficult for them, but it was a wonderful way to learn how God's people had to wait a very long time for Jesus, the promised Redeemer, to come.

As our boys grew older, they were able to experience a deeper, more meaningful time of preparation for Jesus' birth. The Advent season gave them the opportunity to light Advent candles, read Scriptures, sing carols, and participate in pageants. The wait was long, but the time was rich with tradition.

Today, even with grown children, tradition and anticipation bring our family back together during Advent. The traditional Advent wreath adorns the table, and, with great anticipation, we count down the days until Christmas. Anticipation is still always in our hearts, for the glorious day when Jesus will return. In the meantime, we prepare our hearts and minds and wait, knowing God's timing is perfect.

by Sue Funkhouser

Equip (for parents)

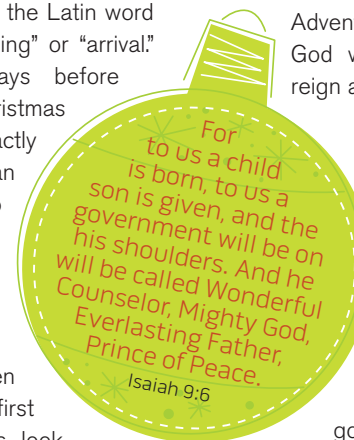
The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming" or "arrival." Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Though it is not clear exactly when this tradition began (there are many references to Advent-type festivals through history), the church introduced Advent as a season to prepare for the coming of the Messiah.

Advent is a time when believers celebrate the first Advent of Jesus as well as look forward in longing and anticipation to His second Advent—a time when He will come again as King, vanquish evil, and rule with righteousness over all. For those who take part in Advent, their focus during the Christmas season is shared between the joy of the First Advent, Christ's incarnation, and the longing for the Second Advent, the day when God will come to set the world right.

During the Advent season, many churches decorate their sanctuary with the color purple—the color of fasting and penitence, as well as the color of royalty to welcome the coming of the King. Because purple is also used in Lent services (Lent is the season of fasting before Easter), the color shows an important connection between the two seasons: the purpose of Jesus coming as a man was to reveal God's grace through His death and resurrection.

Though many Protestant evangelical churches do not take part in Advent, many incorporate Advent traditions in various ways. In the midst of a season that is often marked by excess, Advent provides a way for believers to reorient themselves to the purpose of Christmas. It provides a reminder of the

mystery of the incarnation of Jesus and also an invitation to wait patiently for the Second Advent of God's Son—a time when God will redeem all creation, and reign as the victorious King of all. ☪



Support (for parents & kids)

This week, **JUST FOR FUN**, gather some materials (card stock, stickers, markers, or crayons) to make cards.

Tell your children that you are going to take some time to focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

Share with your children how easy it is to get wrapped up in all the festivities that surround this holiday. Then, read the account of Jesus' birth in **Luke 2:1-16**. Remind your children how long God's people waited for the Messiah.

Together as a family, make birthday cards for Jesus. Decorate the cards and write a special message to Him. Use this time as an opportunity to say thank you to Jesus for coming to earth and sacrificing His life for us. Place the cards in a prominent place in your home and let them serve as a reminder that Jesus is our promised Redeemer.

Remind your children that what you read was a part of The Big God Story and they will learn more this week in church about Jesus' birth. ☪

This resource is designed to encourage your family to have time in God's Word **before your children attend church**. Because God's plan is for parents to be the primary spiritual nurturers of their children's faith, we know that as you grow spiritually, your children will grow spiritually as well.