



*St Paul's Episcopal Church
Cambria, California 93428
"Serving Christ by Loving Others"
stpaulscambria.org*

Why do we use blue during Advent?



First, a little background information. A Parament or Parement; (from Late Latin *paramentum*, adornment, *parare*, to prepare, equip), a term applied by ancient writers to the hangings or ornaments of a room of state.

Later it has referred to the liturgical hangings on and around the altar, as well as the cloths hanging from the pulpit and lectern, and the ecclesiastical vestments and mitres.

Advent means "coming or arrival," and the reason for the season is anticipation and preparation for the birth of the Christ child and His second coming. In the early church, however, it was a time for candidates to prepare for church membership. After the fourth century, it became a time for preparation for Christmas, and penitence was added as a standard for the whole church in the Middle Ages!

Now, many Christian churches are again shifting the emphasis of Advent from a penitential season, such as Lent, to a celebration of hope and anticipation. That in no means takes away from the fact that Advent is also a time of preparation and introspection.



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In an effort to again distinguish between Advent and Lent, some denominations have changed the color of Advent to various shades of blue. Some Roman Catholic churches have changed to a blue violet. Although we, as Episcopalians, all grew up with purple and red violet, the early 12th century Black Canon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre ordered black as the color for Advent! But, blue is by no means new to our church either. Before the 12th century, it was used in the Western Church.

The Sarum Rite was the original basis for the liturgy of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and where blue was used for the color of Advent. It was often specified that it be an indigo to represent the darkness before the birth. Early art shows church leaders in ornately decorated blue robes. Shades of blue symbolize royalty, the coming of the King, hope, the night sky before the dawn, the sea before creation, and Mary. Remember early dyes were made from nature. Some historians suggest that northern European dyes were made from berries that produced blue while southern Europe was able to make purple dyes.

Tradition puts the rose-colored candle in the Advent wreath---not to symbolize Mary, but to reflect the lessening emphasis on penitence, the nearing of the end of the fast, the pending birth, and the second coming. Rose or pink represents joy. The 3rd Sunday in Advent marks the halfway point, and we are allowed to be excited for the coming event. In the Roman Catholic tradition, it is called Gaudete Sunday, from the Latin for "rejoice." It takes its name from one of the traditional readings from Philippians which begins, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

The dark blue was chosen to represent the night sky before creation. The four stripes represent the four weeks of Advent with the 3rd rose-colored stripe indicating Gaudete Sunday. The tau cross is referred to as an anticipatory cross, and it is one of the traditional symbols for Advent. The design was kept simple to reflect the tone of the season.