

Purple is for Advent

by Rita Burns Senseman

With the start of Advent, you will likely see an Advent wreath as well as splashes of purple around the church. By now, you have heard Advent described as the four-week period prior to Christmas when Christians prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. So, why the purple?

Purple is a penitential color. That means that the color is to remind us of our need to repent and change our hearts. The purple of Advent is a little different from the purple you may see during Lent. In fact, sometimes the purple we use during Advent has more of a blue undertone. This blue-purple is intended to distinguish the Advent season from the Lenten season. So, what is the difference?

Both Advent and Lent have penitential themes. Lent is a longer, more intense time of spiritual recollection and penance. Advent is a more hopeful season and our acts of penance are part of our preparation for the Lord's coming both now and at the end of time.

Thus, when we suggest that your child and your family do acts of penance, what we are suggesting is that you do something extra to help you focus more intentionally and prayerfully on the coming of the Messiah. Although you may already have an activity or reflection booklet that gives you suggestions for each day of Advent, here are some other ideas that might be a bit more penitential in nature.

- Volunteer to deliver Christmas baskets to needy families. Or, volunteer to serve a meal at your local soup kitchen or work a shift at the food pantry.
- Make a special effort to pray before bedtime each night with your child. Use one of the traditional prayers of the Catholic faith. Or, pray spontaneously from your heart. You may also choose to sing an Advent song or refrain such as "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" or "Soon and Very Soon".
- Attend an Advent Penance and Reconciliation service at your parish or at a nearby parish. Even if your child has not yet celebrated First Penance and Reconciliation, such services foster a spirit of penance and reflection.
- Use the Advent wreath as a focus of prayer before the evening meal. As you light each candle, pray "Come, Lord Jesus." (Or, "Maranatha".) Then, bow your heads and observe thirty seconds of silence before you begin to eat.
- Make homemade Christmas cards and mail or deliver them to those who are homebound. The parish office will have a list of folks in your parish who are homebound. Or, contact your local assisted living facility to see if you might share your cards with the residents there, particularly residents who have no family members or friends nearby.

Rita Burns Senseman is a co-author of Young Apprentices, RCL Benziger's unique online resource for those who facilitate the RCIA process with children and youth. In addition, she is widely known for her writings and presentation work focusing on the RCIA with children and youth.