

# Celebrating Advent and Christmas

Keep these ideas in mind as you study **Unit 2, Session 10**.

Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year. During Advent, we prepare for Jesus' birth by reflecting on who he is and how his coming will shape our lives.

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We wait in joyful hope for Christ's Second Coming at the end of time.

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The early Christians relied on apologists, or defenders of the faith, and Doctors of the Church to help them answer questions about who Jesus is.

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Short verses sung between December 17 and December 23 as part of the Liturgy of the Hours are known as the O Antiphons. The official prayer of the Church is the Liturgy of the Hours.

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We reflect on the antiphons. As we prepare our minds and hearts for the birth of Jesus, we reflect on the name that means "God is with us," or *Emmanuel*.

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God has sent messengers, or heralds, to awaken us to Christ's presence among us. This ongoing presence is at the heart of our Christmas celebration.

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Biblical heralds include Isaiah and Gabriel. The prophet Isaiah spoke about a child to come who would be named Emmanuel. The angel who visited Mary to tell her she would soon be Jesus' mother was Gabriel.

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Other biblical heralds were John the Baptist and Paul. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance so that people would be ready to welcome Jesus into their lives. After Jesus' Death, Paul brought the message of Salvation to the Gentiles.

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Repentance is our turning away from sin, with a desire to change our lives and live more closely to how God wants us to live.

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Saints served as heralds too. Saint Francis of Assisi set up the first crèche, or Nativity scene, that portrayed the birth of Christ. Saint Hildegard of Bingen led her community and composed songs about God's beauty.

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