



## Christmas Preparations

Advent, the season preceding Christmas, always seems to me like the best time to experiment with visual imagery for those congregations unaccustomed to art in worship. For one, even the non-religious among us already seem caught up in the celebration of Christmas in the weeks up to the actual holiday. This is somewhat inevitable considering the influence of the retail markets. Still, Advent and Christmas are not really the same thing.

Advent is a time of preparing for the coming of Christ. There are many obvious and not-so-obvious things that can be done within the worship setting that will direct our attention to the momentous event of God's incarnation. Because the celebration of Christmas itself is so natural to all Christians, withholding and delaying the nearly one month celebration that the secular culture promotes can ultimately heighten our anticipation of the coming Savior. It is a behavior that sets us apart.

This is why Advent is such a good beginning for the incorporation of visual elements. It prepares and sets up the momentum for the year to come. Of course, Advent is the beginning of the Church calendar, so it inducts worshippers into the pace of the liturgical year.

This pacing is an important consideration for how a worshipping body or congregation approaches visual elements. The Church calendar ebbs and flows. Not every day is designated as a huge celebration like Christmas or Easter. While we may be continually thankful and worship weekly and daily, we reserve these tremendous celebrations for certain times. That means that over-the-top visual effects cannot be sustained for every Sunday. The impact is lost when the uncommon is made commonplace.

Use this Advent—or the coming Lenten season—to consider the role of quiet preparation in the life of the Church. Just as all creation waited in anticipation of the Messiah, it waits, again, for His final and triumphant return. In the busy-ness and confusion of our chaotic contemporary lives even Christians—*especially* Christians—can use some visual reminders that what we see in the here-and-now is not all there is. More, the best, is yet to come.