

Advent, Part 1

December 3, 2017

In our present disposition of the liturgical calendar, the liturgical year begins with the first Sunday of Advent, but it was not always this way. In the ancient Sacramentaries, the liturgical year began with the solemnity of Christmas. The reason for this is that the Incarnation of the Word is the central point in the long history of humanity and it marks the beginning of the fullness of time, and so it was also used for the beginning of the liturgical year. The present arrangement in the missal is perhaps more logical since it corresponds more with the history of humanity, whereby the time of Advent represents the time before Christ and Christmas marks the veritable center of our history with the remaining parts of the liturgical year marking the time after Christ's birth.

It was in the 5th c. with the Christological heresies of Nestorius that the commemoration of the birth of the Saviour was given a greater importance and fervor. The proclamations against these heresies brought out more clearly the dogma of the two natures in Christ, the divine and human, with one unique divine person. These clarifications of the dogma showed forth more clearly the glory and prerogatives of the Theotokos and a real impetus of Catholic piety toward the mystery of the incarnation (Card. Schuster commentary in his *Liber Sacramentorum*). It is likely that during this period the season of Advent developed into what we have today.

Advent is a penitential season, though not as strict as Lent. The spirit of penance and sorrow consumes us during Lent in view of Holy Week, when our Lord enters His Passion for our sins. The Advent liturgy, on the contrary, is looking to the joyous coming of our Savior and our liberation from sin which His coming announces. The liturgy during Advent is seasoned with tender feelings and desires for the coming of the Savior. Though it is a penitential season, the spirit of penance is quite different from Lent. As our Lord said in John 8:56, "Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see my day: he saw it and was glad."

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