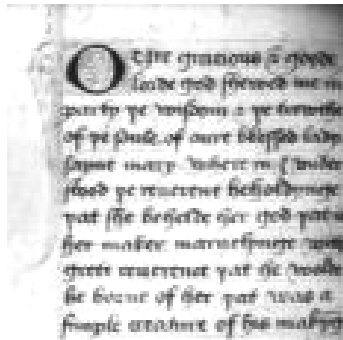


The antiphons create a tiny theology textbook on who Christ is. *O Wisdom* reminds us that Christ is the Logos, the Word of God, through whom all things are created. *O Adonai* calls upon the Lord who spoke from the Burning Bush, telling Moses to lead his people to freedom. *Root of Jesse* speaks of Christ born of the line of David; God, born into a human family. *O Key of David* refers to Christ who has the power to open all the prisons we find ourselves in, and to lock away all things that hinder us in our journey to God. *O Rising Dawn* is the promise that even in our darkest times, Christ, the Light of the World, will shine forth. *O King of the Nations* looks forward to Christ's reign of justice and peace. *O Emmanuel* brings us to Bethlehem, to that moment in history when Christ became a human being.



We shall use the Antiphons throughout Advent, either as a spoken litany or by singing the well-known 9<sup>th</sup> century hymn “Come, O Come, Emmanuel”.

I wish you all a very blessed Advent, and Christmas joy when Christ is born!

**Garry J. Deverell**

## The Symbols of Advent

Advent is the first season of the Church's year. Encompassing four Sundays, it begins on the first Sunday of Advent, and ends at sundown on Christmas Eve. The word “Advent” means *arrival*, which reveals the central meaning of the season: a time in which the Church looks, with great anticipation, for the arrival of Jesus in the world.

To help us reflect on what the arrival of Jesus might mean for us today, we shall be using a number of different symbols during Advent worship.

### The Jesse Tree

The Jesse Tree is named from Isaiah 11.1: “A shoot will spring forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots.” It is a symbol of the faith and family of God from which Jesus came. Jesus is like a new branch springing from an old family and faith. We shall use the Jesse Tree to think about the importance of our forbears in teaching us to place our faith and hope in Christ.



Our own Jesse tree is a Melaleuca. Some Melaleucas, like Eucalypts, are regenerated by fire; they have to be destroyed in order to be born anew. The biblical Branch is a sign of newness in the midst of destruction or discouragement. The idea of the new Branch from an old stump became a way to talk about the expected messiah (e.g., Jer 23.5) who would save Israel from all its troubles. The presence of the Jesse Tree in our church during Advent will remind us that Jesus came to suffer the full consequences of

our all-too-human sin and despair, but then to rise again as a sign of hope for all who would follow him.

Christians long for the full reign of the messiah, and the kingdom of Peace that he will bring. So, while we celebrate the birth of the Branch, the new shoot from the stump of Jesse, we shall anticipate with hope the Second Advent, and await the completion of the promise.

### Wreath and Candles

At the front of the church you will notice the presence of a circular wreath of green, with four candles about it. The wreath is a circle of evergreen branches that reminds us of God's love. Like a circle, God's love has no beginning or end. Like an evergreen tree, it is forever alive and growing. God's love never fails.



The Advent candles are purple and white. Purple is the colour of kings, but it is also the colour of bruises. It reminds us that while Jesus may indeed be the royal Son of God, in fact he came to share our humanity, to suffer and die that a new kind of humanity might be born from his suffering. Purple is also the colour of Lent, the season in which we remember Christ's journey to the cross and resurrection. It is used during Advent to remind us that God's love is not insipid or sentimental, but costly and real.

The white candle that stands at the centre of the wreath is known as the Christ Candle. It will be lit on Christmas Eve to signify Christ's arrival in our midst.

### Nativity Scene

The traditional name for Christmas is the Feast of the Nativity. The word "Nativity" literally means to "become native" or to be born into a particular community and place. For Christians, the Feast of the Nativity celebrates the very human birth of the unique Son of God to Mary and Joseph of Nazareth.



CHRIST IS BORN TO US  
COME. LET US ADORE

During Advent, we shall anticipate the nativity of Christ by slowly building up the traditional scene of his birth in Bethlehem. Around the manger where (according to Luke) the saviour was laid, we shall place his parents, a stable, animals and shepherds, as well as stars and angels. This scene will become, for us, a symbol of cosmic anticipation as we, together with the whole creation, await the messiah's birth.

### The "O" Antiphons

A key component of the gathering rites during our Advent worship will be a series of responsive invocations known as the "O" Antiphons. Each antiphon contains an invocation of Jesus, using one of his biblical titles: *O Wisdom, O Lord* etc., ending with *O Emmanuel*, meaning 'God with us'. Each contains a tiny prayer for God's people, and the petition that Christ will come very soon. The O Antiphons are very old, going back to the Vesper Prayers for Advent offered by the faithful in the eighth century Roman rite.