



Unboxing the Mystery of Advent

The Wired Word for the Week of November 30, 2025

In the News

If you are in the market for Advent calendars to give yourself or to others, be advised that many of the most popular brands are already sold out for 2025. Interest in the category boomed during the pandemic, and has only grown since then.

One reason for the increase has been the marketing of Advent calendars for adults. Originally invented to help children patiently wait for the holiday celebration, savvy entrepreneurs saw an opportunity to build brand familiarity and customer loyalty, expand market share, and grow sales through targeting people of all ages with various interests.

"When I grew up, everyone had a calendar, but it was definitely something for kids," said Fredrik Nilsson, the chief executive of luxury licorice company Lakrids by Bülow. "Adults would not have a Christmas calendar." The company's first Advent calendar, created in 2011, was perhaps the first produced for adults, and 1,000 were sold. Today the confectionery makes 300,000 a year.

This year, Saks Fifth Avenue offered 18 Advent calendars, ranging in cost from \$65 to \$3,500.

According to *KIRO7*, "The advent calendar ... format creates 24 separate moments of discovery spread across nearly a month. Each day's reveal generates a small dopamine hit, keeping consumers engaged through repetition and anticipation."

Internet influencers have been "unboxing" Advent calendars for months already, opining about the quality, value and affordability of what each has to offer. Some mark "12 Days of Christmas" while others feature 25 doors, windows, drawers, pockets or boxes, to be opened one day at a time beginning on December 1 and concluding on Christmas Day.

While early calendars often revealed images or Bible verses related to Jesus' birth, or gifts intended to remind people of God's gifts to us in Christ, the overwhelming majority of Advent calendars for sale today have little to nothing to do with that narrative. Instead, they may be stocked with various food items, from premium chocolates, specialty cheese and crackers or exotic snacks or spices from around the world, limited edition jams, ice cream, condiments, sauces, noodles, cookies, caviar, hot chocolate, coffee, tea or mini-bottles of wine, liquor or craft beer.

Non-food Advent "countdown" calendars feature pet treats, sports cards, equipment and collectibles, mini-ornaments, jewelry, puzzles, fragrance (candles, perfume), full- and travel-size beauty products, craft kits, trinkets, tools, gadgets, [storybooks](#), and more. The Jacquie Lawson downloadable [2025 Christmas Village Advent Calendar](#) features the opportunity to construct an animated Christmas village one building at a time. Her [Paris Advent Calendar](#) and [Edwardian Advent Calendar](#) from recent years are also available. Purchasers can decorate Christmas trees, wreaths and cookies; create snowflakes; click on numbered ornaments that open stories, activities, artwork, games, puzzles, Christmas music, travelogues, coloring sheets, and more.

Promoters suggest that Advent calendars can help people get into the holiday spirit, adding an element of surprise and delight day after day, building excitement to a crescendo until Christmas Day arrives. Who doesn't love the thrill of opening a mysterious package, contents unknown? A memorable romantic Advent calendar might begin with small gifts, leading to a ring and a proposal on the big holiday!

Buyers of Advent calendars may also find pleasure in the opportunity to "pretend-travel the world" from the comfort of their armchairs, to dip their toes in a river of extravagance and luxury not normally available to them, to participate for a few days in "the lifestyles of the rich and famous" for a fraction of the cost such lifestyles actually entail.

The word "advent" (from the Latin *adventus*) refers to a "coming" or an "arrival." For followers of Jesus, the season is intended to remind us that we're living between Jesus' first and second advents. We rejoice in his coming into the world long ago in Bethlehem, while recognizing that we await his second coming, when God's just and peaceable kingdom will be experienced in all its fullness. In the meantime, we can observe Advent by partnering with Jesus as we practice loving God and caring for our neighbors to bring God's hope, peace and joy to fulfillment on Earth.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[10 Things You Might Not Know About Advent Calendars. *Guideposts*](#)

[Chocolate, Chanel and Cheddar: How Advent Calendars Became Every Brand's Favorite Limited-edition Platform. *KIRO7*](#)

[The Best Advent Calendars Are Selling Out Fast. Here Are My 28 Favorites That Are Still in Stock. *CNN*](#)

[Why Adults Are Scrambling For Food-focused Advent Calendars -- and Paying \\$945. *LA Times*](#)

['Superfluous Consumerism': Adult Advent Calendar Trend Alarms Green Groups. *The Guardian*](#)

Applying the News Story

Some churches use the lighting of candles on an Advent wreath in the weeks leading up to Christmas, highlighting themes (usually hope, peace, joy and love) or key figures in the Nativity narrative (shepherds, angels, Joseph, Mary, or others, such as Anna the prophet, Simon or the Magi). Then, on Christmas Eve, a fifth candle at the wreath's center, sometimes called the "Christ Candle," is lit to symbolize God's light illuminating our dark world through the birth of Jesus ([John 1:5-9](#); [John 8:12](#)). Use the news to reflect on how you can prepare your hearts for the arrival of the spirit of Christ who radically transforms the way we live, changing our focus from self-indulgence to honoring God and loving all God created as God has loved us.

The Big Questions

1. What experience, if any, have you had with Advent calendars throughout your life, and how has your experience changed over time, if at all?
2. What purpose might Advent calendars serve? Why use or give one?
3. If you were to design an Advent calendar for children, what gift, image, Bible verse or other item would you put behind one of the doors, and why would you include that?
4. How do we turn our focus from the commercialization of Advent to awaiting the arrival of Jesus?

5. Is the observance of Advent a part of your church practice? If so, what is the purpose of the season? If not, how and why might you introduce Advent to your faith community?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. (For context, read [Isaiah 7:10-25](#).)

Isaiah's prophecy of the birth of a child is set in the context of a reversal of fortunes, in which the enemies of God's people would be defeated, and the weak would be strengthened because of God's presence with them. When Judah's King Ahaz was not brave enough to ask God for a sign of God's favor, God took the initiative to provide a sign: that a son would be born, who would be named Immanuel, meaning "God is with us." Matthew cites this passage in reference to the name given to Jesus ([Matthew 1:21-24](#)).

The first Sunday of Advent is marked by the lighting of a single flame, the flicker of hope shining in the darkness ([John 1:5](#)). When our lives are filled with darkness, hope that God will truly act on our behalf may seem insignificant and weak, but over time it can grow into a conflagration capable of warming our hearts with the gospel of peace that brings great joy to all people and love to the loveless. The prophecy conveys the idea that God does not side with those who wield great military or political power, but with the poor who rely on God.

The Hebrew words most often used for hope in the Bible can also be translated as "wait," so to hope in God means to wait expectantly for God to keep his promises. This hope is rooted not in wishful thinking that someday,

maybe things will get better, but in the unchanging, faithful character of God who has promised to make all things new. That hope enables us to never give up doing what is right, because our labor in the work of God is not in vain ([1 Corinthians 15:58](#)).

Questions: On what particular promises of God are you relying this season of Advent? How do those promises give you hope in dark times?

John 14:18, 27

[Jesus said,] "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."
(For context, read [John 14:1, 18-29](#).)

The second week of Advent, we light the candle of peace, joining the light of hope in God's character that undergirds God's promises. Christians understand the promise of a child who would be known as the Prince of Peace as a reference to Jesus ([Isaiah 9:6](#)), a ruler from one of the little clans of Judah, "the one of peace" who brings safety and provision for hungry people, ([Micah 5:2-5](#)).

This passage in John's gospel is part of Jesus' final words to his disciples before his crucifixion. Yet he speaks of his coming (which is what Advent is all about), and of how he and his Father will come and make their home with those who love him and keep his word (v. 23).

Questions: What is the nature of the peace Jesus gives? How is it different from the peace the world gives? How can we participate in the peace of Jesus? In what sense do Jesus and his Father "come and make their home" with those who keep his word found in [Matthew 5:9](#)?

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you

good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (For context, read [Luke 2:8-20](#).)

The angels bring news of the birth of the one anointed by God to save his people not to the rich and powerful, but to common working people. The news is not for the privileged few, but for *all* the people, great and small. When the shepherds traveled to Bethlehem and saw the promised child with their own eyes, they were filled with joy and praise for all that God had done.

In his conversation with his disciples during the Last Supper, Jesus says, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" ([John 15:11](#)). The Bible tells us that Jesus endured the cross for the joy waiting at the end of his journey, the joy of accomplishing his goal of restoring humankind to right relations with God and God's creation ([Hebrews 12:1-2](#)).

The third week of Advent, the candle of joy is lit, not because suffering or struggle has been eliminated, but because God's presence remains with us, bringing comfort and courage, whatever we are experiencing.

Questions: How is the joy Jesus brings different from happiness based on favorable circumstances? How can we experience that joy in the most trying times?

John 3:16

[Jesus said,] "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (For context, read [John 3:16-17](#).)

The fourth candle of Advent, the candle of love, brings into focus the kind of love for which God created humankind, a love not driven by human desire

for self-gratification, but by commitment to the well-being of others, even when it requires self-sacrifice for friends ([John 15:13](#)), and even for enemies ([Matthew 5:43-48](#)). Jesus demonstrated that kind of love when he forgave the very people who condemned him to death ([Luke 23:34](#)). The love of God in Christ empowers us to love as we have been loved ([1 John 4:19](#)).

Questions: When has God's love compelled you to love someone you were not inclined to love? How can you show God's love toward opponents, enemies and the undeserving?

For Further Discussion

1. Scan [this story](#) about how one church dealt with a zealous neighbor who kept placing a baby doll in the empty manger in their nativity scene during Advent. The pastor explained to the congregation that they would deliberately leave the manger empty until Christmas, because Advent is a season of waiting for what has not yet arrived.

"I understand why a tender-hearted, well-meaning, doll collector would take corrective action to make things look and feel right," writes the author. "Because this is precisely the way Advent is supposed to feel. Like there is something missing. Like there is something about our world that's not quite right. Advent reminds us that we're still waiting for Jesus to come and make us whole and heal our broken world."

What aching longing does Advent symbolize for you?

2. Respond to this, from TWW team member Mary Sells: "I didn't grow up with celebration of Advent or the use of Advent calendars and, at my age, still work at understanding the beauty of this period of time. My current church does different adult programs each year for Advent; this year we'll be using meditative practices each week that are rooted in the gospel readings.

"Last year we walked through rooms, acting out Bible stories, which we then discussed over potluck dinner. There are so many Bible stories to get us to Jesus' arrival, from the Old Testament prophets to the meeting of Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, and the Magi following the star to John the Baptist's 'Prepare the way of the Lord' message. It seems to me the simple countdown to Christmas, Jesus's birth, went from a simple religious practice for children to a commercial gifting free-for-all that has little to do with the anticipation of Jesus' coming to be with us."

3. The phenomenon known as FOMO (the "Fear Of Missing Out") [has been described as](#) "the anxious feeling that other people are having more rewarding or exciting experiences than you are." Seeing what others are purchasing or what friends or icons recommend may motivate us to spend money on products we don't really need or want, because we imagine that having those objects or experiences will somehow fill a void in our own souls. How might the FOMO factor into the way people choose Advent calendars in our culture?

4. Some environmentalists contend that the rise in popularity of Advent calendars for adults is causing '[Superfluous Consumerism](#)' that contributes to excessive packaging and pollution. According to Anna Diski, a plastics campaigner at Greenpeace UK, "Advent calendars ... probably contain two or three items you actually want, and 20 or so more you could do without."

Daniel Webb, the founder and director of the charity Everyday Plastic, said: "These luxury Advent calendars are a microcosm of a bigger problem, a system that keeps producing more and more stuff we don't need and probably can't afford."

How can consumers enjoy the fun and celebration of Advent calendars while maintaining high ethical standards regarding sustainability and care for the environment?

Responding to the News

1. Peace Catalyst International has produced an excellent resource, [Recovering the Heart of Advent: Weekly Advent Devotional](#), you can use with your family and/or congregation in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Another option is the [BibleProject Guide: Advent](#).
2. You may wish to use a carol such as "[The Candle of Hope](#)," during the lighting of an Advent wreath at home or in your church's worship service, singing the appropriate verse during each week of the season, culminating in the singing of the final verse with the lighting of the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve. As an alternative, you could sing verse 1 the first week of Advent, verses 1 and 2 the second week, adding a verse each week until Christmas arrives.

Prayer suggested by [Jeremiah 23:5-6](#)

God of grace, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, we await the king who will "deal wisely and execute justice and righteousness." By your Spirit, empower us to live wisely, as children of the light and love of Jesus. So may our waiting not be passive, but active participation in your transformative work within and through us, to bring blessing and not a curse to all your creation. Amen.

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