



ADVENT WREATH

The Advent Wreath is a long-standing tradition although it is not a liturgical symbol – that is, it is not an official part of the Church’s rituals or liturgies. Its actual origins are unknown, but there is evidence that Scandinavians, during the winter, placed lighted candles around a wheel, and prayers were offered to the god of light to turn “the wheel of the earth” back toward the sun to lengthen the days and restore warmth.

Since the Middle Ages, Christians have used Advent Wreaths as part of their spiritual preparations for Christmas. By 1600, both Catholics and Lutherans had some formal practices surrounding the Advent Wreath.

The wreath is made of various evergreens signifying continuous growth. The laurel signifies victory over persecution and suffering. Pine, holly and yew represent immortality. Cedar signifies strength and healing. Holly’s prickly leaves remind us of the crown of thorns. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning and no end, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life found in Christ. Any pine cones, nuts or seedpods used to decorate the wreath symbolize life and resurrection.

Four candles represent the four weeks of Advent and they reflect Advent’s liturgical colors. Three candles are dark blue-violet, the predawn color, and one candle is rose to remind us to be joyful on the third Sunday of Advent because we have arrived at the midpoint of Advent and our Christmas preparations. White candles are always acceptable.

One candle is lit on the First Sunday of Advent and relit each day throughout the first week. On the Second Sunday of Advent, the adjoining candle is lit, and throughout the second week. On each of the next two Sundays, another candle is lit, so that during the Fourth Week of Advent all four candles are burning.

Adapted from Christ is Coming by Theresa Cotter and “The History of the Advent Wreath” by William Saunders.

Prayers for the Advent Wreath on the reverse side were taken from Theresa Cotter’s Christ Is Coming (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

First Week

Hush. Be still.
Advent is a quiet season,
a time of prayer,
a time of meditation.
Advent is a time for marveling
at inner mysteries,
at hidden secrets,
at life itself.
Advent is a time for watching
in awed silence.
Advent is a time for waiting
in Mary-like faithfulness.

*O Gentle God of stillness,
let this candle
which we now light,
be a mute summons to prayer.
Help our wondering,
our yearning,
our seeking.
You, Divine Mystery,
became human to be with us.
In mystery no less divine,
we are called to be with you!
In patient faith, we pray:
Come, O Word divine!*

Second Week

Advent is a family season.
It is a time of closeness,
of interdependence,
of bountiful love extended.
Especially now do we affirm family:
those of home and heart,
those of our parish and community,
those in struggle and in pain,
and everyone in God's incredibly
diverse family.
With letters and cards and presents,
with the generosity of our hearts,
with the music of our lives,
with spontaneous love,
we celebrate family!

*Creator of the Universe,
let these candles,
which we now light,
remind us that we are your children.
In love you created the human family
and all that was, is and will be.
Yet you, who are our Creator,
are also our brother!
And so in awestruck wonder we pray:
Come, O Love Divine!*

Third Week

Joyful, joyful!
How overflowing with joy is Advent!
It is a time of activity –
of cradle-making and shopping,

of traveling,
of preparing swaddling clothes
of make-ahead food,
of celebrating the gift of life!
Advent is a time of expectation –
of preparing for Christ's birth,
of proclaiming our faith
in Christ's second coming.
In Christ is our joy!

*O God of darkness and light,
let this candle,
which we now light,
remind us of the wonder of Christ.
In you is gladness!
In you we find our fulfillment
and the abundance of joy
In excited expectation of new life,
we exclaim:
Come, O Light divine!*

Fourth Week

Advent is a season of openness and hope.
It is a time of trusting—
trusting in divine goodness.
and in the goodness of each other.
As Advent draws to a close
we recognize that Christmas—
and Christ's presence—
may not be what we expect.
God, who delights in surprises,
calls us to openness.
Only if we are open
can we recognize
a Messiah in a newborn baby,
a Savior in a condemned criminal,
the Christ present in each of us!

*O God of hopeful surprises
and surprising hope,
let these candles,
which we now light,
open our hearts to you.
You have surrounded us with your love!
Help us respond to that love.
And may we remember, O God,
during this busy season,
that as we greet each other,
we are greeting you,
who are truly present in us all!
Come, O God-Made-Manifest!*