

Advent Wreath



*Saint Michael the Archangel
Catholic Church
Lake Jackson, Texas*

The History and Meaning of the Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is part of our long-standing Catholic tradition. However, the actual origins are uncertain. There is evidence of pre-Christian Germanic peoples using wreathes with lit candles during the cold and dark December days as a sign of hope in the future warm and extended-sunlight days of Spring. In Scandinavia during Winter, lighted candles were placed 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.

By the Middle Ages, the Christians adapted this tradition and used Advent wreathes as part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas. After all, Christ is "the Light that came into the world" to dispel the darkness of sin and to radiate the truth and love of God (cf. John 3:19-21). By 1600, both Catholics and Lutherans had more formal practices surrounding the Advent wreath.

The symbolism of the Advent wreath is beautiful. The wreath can be made of various evergreens, signifying continuous life. Even these evergreens have a traditional meaning which can be adapted to our faith: Laurel signifies victory over persecution and suffering; pine, holly, and yew, immortality; and cedar, strength and healing. Holly also has a special Christian symbolism: The prickly leaves remind us of the crown of thorns, and one English legend tells of how the cross was made of holly. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or 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 also symbolize life and resurrection. All together, the wreath of evergreens depicts the immortality of our soul and the new, everlasting life promised to us through Christ, the eternal Word of the Father, who entered our world becoming true man and who was victorious over sin and death through His own passion, death, and resurrection.

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The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent. A tradition is that each week represents one thousand years, to sum to the 4,000 years from Adam and Eve until the Birth of the Savior. Three candles are purple and one is rose. The purple candles in particular symbolize the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and good works undertaken at this time. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, when the priest also wears rose vestments at Mass; Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday of rejoicing, because the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent, when their preparation is now half over and they are close to Christmas. The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of His second coming to judge the living and the dead.

One modern day adaption includes maintaining the three purple candles and single rose colored candle in the circumference of the evergreen wreath, while adding a white candle placed in the center of the wreath. This white candle represents Christ, is lit on Christmas Eve, and can continue to be present along with the original Advent candles throughout the Christmas season.

Another adaptation is to replace the three purple and one rose candles with four white candles on Christmas Eve. These white candles can be lit at meals throughout the Christmas season. This reconfiguration is a re-fashioning of the Advent Wreath to become a Christmas Wreath, providing for continuity from the Advent season of waiting for the advent (coming) of Jesus, to the Christmas season, celebrating His arrival.

In family practice, an opportune time to light your wreath is at a meal or other occasion during the day when the family can be present as one group.

Resources / Suppliers Of Advent Wreaths

ST. MICHAEL PREFERRED SUPPLIER:

St. Michael's Knights of Columbus
After weekend Masses
In the Hallway of the Family Life Center

OTHER LOCAL SUPPLIERS:

Hobby Lobby (125 Tx 332, Lake Jackson)
(979) 297-8591

NEARBY SUPPLIERS:

Sacco's (2323 San Jacinto, Houston)
(800) 231-7513

ONLINE VENDORS:

Autom -
<http://www.autom.com/>

Catholic Supply of St. Louis -
<http://www.catholicssupply.com/christmas/chadvwrea.html>

Abbey Press -
<http://www.saintmeinradgiftshop.com/>

Setting Up an Advent Wreath

To construct the wreath you will need: candles, candle holders, and evergreens (live or artificial). All of these items are available from local merchants or online. See the list of suppliers below.

Candles for wreaths can be either candlestick size, votive candle size, or pillar candle size. Go to our Advent wreath configurations page

Candle holders can be any of these or similar forms:

- A metal ring containing four sockets to hold candlestick size candles. These are available from vendors. An alternative would be to use small single candle holders for each of the four candles.
- Four votive candle holders (glass or metal)
- Four pillar candle bases (any composition)

Evergreens can be either live clippings from evergreen trees or simulated (plastic) evergreens obtained from vendors.

Plan to have your wreath set up for use on the First Sunday of Advent. Many families light their wreath for the new week at their large dinner. It is also common to light the wreath during each meal.

Provide a copies of the Advent Wreath brochure for each person to follow along and say the prayers together with the prayer leader..

On the First Sunday of Advent the prayer leader leads the prayer at the bottom of the “Dedicating Your Advent Wreath” page. Then one or more members of the group reads the information about the First Sunday of Advent, the Prophets' Candle, after which they say the prayer for that Sunday.

On the successive Sundays of Advent the prayer leader reads the information about the respective Sunday of Advent after which they say the prayer for that Sunday.

Advent Wreath Configurations



Advent Wreath with natural ever-green boughs and pillar candles.



Advent Wreath with natural ever-green boughs and 10" taper candles in dinner table candle bases.



Advent Wreath with natural ever-green boughs and votive candles in glass votive candle holders..

Dedicating Your Wreath



On the First Sunday of Advent, prior to the lighting of the first candle, your wreath should be dedicated. With the family gathered around, the following prayer is recited:

*Jesus, open our hearts.
Open us to the glory
of your creation.
Help us to know you
in all we see and hear and touch.
Come into our hearts, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*

1st Sunday of Advent

The Prophets' Candle

On the first Sunday in Advent, you light one (purple) candle on your Advent wreath. This first candle is called the Prophets' Candle. It reminds us of the prophets, those special persons who spoke God's word to the people during the hundreds of years before Jesus was born. The prophets told the people what God was going to do, and they instructed the people on how to get ready. Over and over, the prophets warned the people to repent of their sins and to begin obeying God.

The prophet Jeremiah gave an important prophecy about the promised king that God was sending. He said the time was coming when he would fulfill the promise God had made to the people of Israel and Judah. He said that God would choose a righteous descendent of David who would do what is right and just throughout the land..



*Jesus, open our hearts.
Forgive us for the many times
that we've failed to love.
Give us strength to walk in your
way.
Come into our hearts, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*

2nd Sunday of Advent

The Bethlehem Candle

On the second Sunday in Advent, light two (purple) candles on your Advent wreath. The second candle is called the Bethlehem Candle. This candle reminds us of the time when Jesus came to earth as a baby and was born in the small city of Bethlehem.

This candle also reminds us that Jesus promised to come again, in the fullness of time. According to Luke's gospel, these are his words:

"Then the Son of Man will appear, coming
in a cloud with great power and glory.
When these things begin to happen,
stand up and raise your heads,
because your salvation is near." (Lk 21:27-28)



*Jesus, open our hearts.
Make your light shine through us,
so that all who live near us
will praise your holy name.
Come into our hearts, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*

3rd Sunday of Advent

The Shepherds' Candle

On the third Sunday in Advent, light three (2 purple & 1 rose) candles on your Advent wreath. The third (rose) candle is called the Shepherds' Candle. It reminds us of what the shepherds did.

First, the shepherds listened and obeyed the angels even though they were very afraid. Then they saw Jesus and believed. The most important reason why we remember the shepherds and give them a special candle during Advent is because of what they did next - they told all that had happened to them.

Think of ways we can share the light with others, can tell others about Jesus.



*Jesus, open our hearts.
Make your light shine through us,
So that all who live near us
will praise your holy name.
Come into our hearts, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*

4th Sunday of Advent

The Angels' Candle

On the fourth Sunday of Advent, light all four candles on your Advent wreath. The fourth candle is called the Angels' Candle. Luke, in his gospel, tells us about the angel who visited Zechariah to inform him that he and Elizabeth would have a son. The angel also appeared to Mary to tell her that God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus.

Later a chorus of angels sang songs of praise to God to the shepherds in their fields.

Matthew, in his gospel, tells us that on the last day Jesus will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth to gather in his chosen people from one end of the earth to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

The Angels' Candle reminds us of God's action to save people by sending his Son to earth and also of God's plan to gather his people to himself on the last day.



*Open our hearts, Jesus.
Never let us lose hope.
Help us remember that your love
and your promises last forever.
Come into our hearts, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*



For information on setting up
and praying the Advent
wreath devotion in your
home or other setting, go to:
www.smlj.org/advent-wreath

