

# THE ADVENT WREATH



The Advent Wreath – its origins and meaning

Candles

Family Prayer for Lighting of Candles

Blessing of Advent Wreath within Mass

## The Advent Wreath

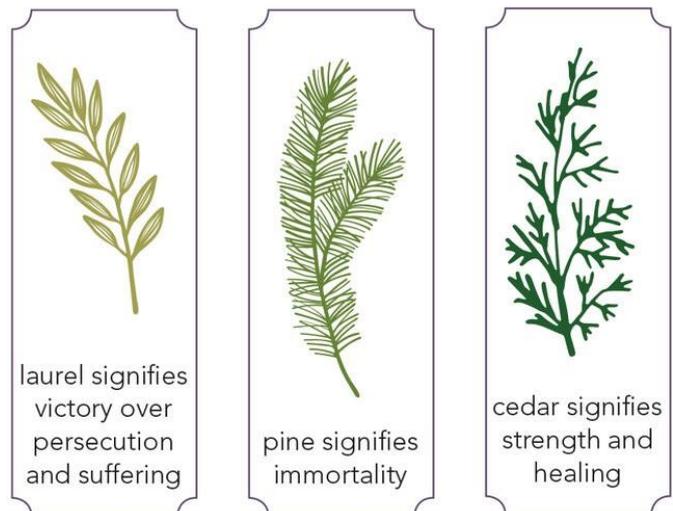
The word “advent” means “coming.” In this season, our focus should be on the two comings of Christ to earth: as our Saviour two thousand years ago, and as our Judge one day in the future. The Advent wreath is a rich symbol of this season.



The Advent wreath is a circular garland of evergreen branches representing eternity. On that wreath, four or five candles are typically arranged. Each candle represents an aspect of the spiritual preparation for the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Advent wreath is made of various evergreens, signifying continuous, everlasting life. The 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 the red berries, the blood of Our Saviour. 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 offered by Christ. Any pine cones, nuts or seedpods used to decorate the wreath also symbolize life and resurrection.

Evergreens signify continuous life



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All together, the wreath of evergreens depicts the immortality of our soul and 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.

## Candles

Advent candles readily demonstrate the strong contrast between darkness and light, which is an important biblical image. Jesus referred to himself as the "Light of the World" that dispels the darkness of sin: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Human history spanned long ages shrouded in the darkness of sin before our prophesied Saviour would finally make his appearance to free us from its dominion. As the Messiah's "Advent" (or "coming") draws nearer another candle is lit, with each candle dispelling the darkness a little more. Thus, the Advent wreath helps us to spiritually contemplate the great drama of salvation history that surrounds the birth of God Incarnate, who comes to redeem the human race and make all things new (Rev. 21:5).

It also reminds us that, as Christians, we're meant to shine the light of Christ in this world. As Jesus tells us, You are the light of the world ...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent. While the number of weeks and days of Advent preparation varied in the early centuries of the church, St. Gregory VII (d. 1095) set the number of Sundays in Advent to four, with the first Sunday marking the beginning of the liturgical year.

Three candles are purple, and one is rose. The purple candles 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 draw closer 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.

The candles also have their own special significance.



The first candle, which is purple, symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the "Prophecy Candle" in remembrance of the prophets, especially Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

The second candle, also purple, represents faith/love. It is called the "Bethlehem Candle" as a reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.



The third candle is pink and symbolizes joy. It is called the "Shepherd's Candle," and is pink, rose being the liturgical colour for joy. The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday, reminding us of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus, as well as the joy of having reached the midpoint of Advent.

On the fourth week of Advent, we light the final purple candle to mark the final week of prayer and penance as we wait for the birth of our Saviour. This final candle, the "Angel's Candle," symbolizes peace. It reminds us of the message of the angels: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men."



## **Family Prayer for Lighting Advent Candles**

*Jesuit Institute*

*This prayer could be used when lighting the candles of the second, third and fourth weeks of Advent, after the wreath has been blessed in the first week.*

Lord,

as we prepare to celebrate

the birth of your son,

Jesus Christ,

Help us to welcome him into our hearts.

As the light of our advent wreath

grows stronger,

week by week,

make us strong in following him

in the love and the peace

we show to others.

Through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **Blessing of an Advent Wreath within Mass:**

*Archdiocese of Dublin*

*The celebrant with hands outstretched prays:*

Lord God,  
your Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Saviour,  
who enlightens our hearts  
and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin.  
Pour out your blessings upon us  
as we light the candles of this wreath;  
may their light reflect the splendour of Christ  
who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Or:**

Lord our God,  
we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ:  
He is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples,  
He is the Wisdom that teaches and guides us,  
He is the saviour of every nation.  
Lord God,  
let your blessing come upon us  
as we light the candles of this wreath.  
May the wreath and its light  
be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.  
May He come quickly and not delay.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.