

## The Meaning of the Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is a Christian tradition that symbolizes the passage of the four weeks of Advent. It is typically made of evergreen leaves and five candles. During the season of Advent one candle on the wreath is lit each Sunday until all of the candles, including the fifth candle, are lit on Christmas Day. Each candle represents an aspect of the spiritual preparation for the celebration of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Most Advent wreaths use three colours – purple, pink, and white.



- **1st CANDLE** – (purple) **THE PROPHECY CANDLE or CANDLE OF HOPE** – We can have hope because God is faithful and will keep the promises made to us. Our hope comes from God.
- **2nd CANDLE** – (purple) **THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF PREPARATION** –Preparation means to “get ready”. Help us to be ready to welcome YOU, O GOD!
- **3rd CANDLE** – (pink) **THE SHEPHERD CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF JOY** – At the birth of Jesus the angels sang a message of JOY!
- **4th CANDLE** – (purple) **THE ANGEL CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF LOVE** - The angels announced the good news of a Saviour. God sent his only Son to earth to save us, because he loves us!
- **5th CANDLE** – (white) **“CHRIST CANDLE”** – The white candle reminds us that Jesus is the spotless lamb of God, sent to wash away our sins! His birth was for his death, his death was for our birth!

### The History of the Advent Wreath

As with many long-standing customs, the origins of the Advent wreath are somewhat debated. Some histories of the advent wreath say that Christians simply adapted an even earlier custom from pre-Christian Germanic tribes. Supposedly, then, these pagan people tried to break the darkness of winter with candles and invoke the sun god to return with the warmth and light of spring. In addition, the evergreen wreath would remind them that there is still life and the circle of time would again come back to spring.

According to this viewpoint, Christians later placed new and Biblical meaning to the old customs. Now the candles pointed to Jesus, the Light of the world (John 3:17-21.) The evergreen wreath now reminded believers that our Saviour God grants new and everlasting life in Jesus. The wreath was also a symbol of victory, for a garland wreath was often placed on victors in contests or conquests. So naturally, a Christian can think of the crown of life that Jesus has won for us. The four candles



in an Advent wreath would then emphasize the four week period of penitence and preparation during Advent, as we eagerly await the coming of the Light of the world to bring new life and hope.

The advent wreath became quite popular in homes in post-Reformation Germany. It seems pretty certain that in many German homes families had a custom of lighting four candles during advent, candles placed in a wreath of evergreens. When these candles were lit, Scripture and prayer was part of the custom and the family devotion time was a time of instructing the children about Christ's coming. Later, the custom crossed over different denominational lines and other faith traditions adapted its use. Today, you can find Advent wreathes in many Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

**Questions:**

- 1) What are the meanings of the four candles on the Advent Wreath?
- 2) What do some people say is the pre-Christian history of the Advent Wreath?
- 3) Where might you find an Advent Wreath?
- 4) What does the circle of the wreath represent?
- 5) Why might it be necessary to prepare and 'celebrate' waiting during Advent?