



Advent

The History & symbolism of the Advent Wreath

'Advent' means 'coming'. Using the Advent Wreath to count the weeks before Christmas almost certainly originated in ancient harvest festivals of northern Europe. Evergreen branches were draped as decoration and wound around wagon wheels brought inside for the winter. These year end celebrations were also marked by feasting and the lighting of lamps against the growing darkness. Early Christians adapted these traditions to fit their celebration of the birth of Christ. Although Advent wreaths originated and remain primarily a tradition for the home, many parishes now incorporate them into the Liturgical environment. The Advent wreath stands in our midst as symbol of Christ who comes to save us.

The growing light of the Advent Wreath is a symbol of Christ who shatters the darkness of sin and death. Each week as the light grows stronger, we grow stronger too in our reverence for and commitment to Christ. The growing light helps us recognise Christ, not only in the historical event we celebrate at Christmas, but in our lives today and in the hope we carry as we prepare for the coming fullness of God's reign.

Evergreen branches also symbolise Christ. As evergreens stand firm against the barren winter, Christ stands firm against the barrenness of sin and death, beckoning us to eternal life. The circular shape of the wreath reminds us that all is complete in Christ and that all is brought to perfect union in him.

Purple candles are used in the Advent wreath to remind us of the season's joyful penitence. A rose coloured candle marks the third Sunday, reminding us that the promise of salvation draws near and that the great feast of Christmas is just around the corner.

The candle colours are derived from the traditional liturgical colours of Advent and Christmas, purple and white respectively. The rose colour is derived from an old Catholic custom of wearing rose coloured vestments on the third Sunday in Advent, called *Gaudete Sunday* i.e. 'Rejoice Sunday'.

Each candle is first lit on the appropriate Sunday of Advent, and then the candles may be lit each day as a part of the individual or family's daily prayers. Certain candles have been given various names. Some parishes name the candles as follows:

- 1. Hope (Purple)**
- 2. Peace (Purple)**
- 3. Joy (Rose ; Gaudate Sunday)**
- 4. Love (Purple)**
- 5. Christ (White)**

(The above words could be placed around the candle with a piece of string on the Sunday that the particular candle is to be lit). e.g. First Sunday in Advent – Hope.

Some parishes name them as:

- 1. Patriarchs**
- 2. Prophets**
- 3. John the Baptist**
- 4. Mary, the mother of Jesus**
- 5. Christ, the light of the world.**