

ADVENT SAYS:
JESUS IS COMING...PREPARE TO RECEIVE HIM!

Advent means "The Coming." It is a season of spiritual preparation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each Advent begins a new Christian year, and it is a time when we look forward and backward - forward as we prepare for the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead; backward as we prepare to celebrate once again the commemoration of our Lord's birth in Bethlehem.

There are actually three dimensions to Advent: past, present, and future. Not only do we remember his birth almost two thousand years ago and anticipate his coming again at the end of time, but we also look for his coming among us in the present - in word and sacrament, in prayer and praise, and in the fellowship of his body, the Church.

A popular Advent devotion for use in the home centers around the use of the advent wreath. This is a custom that originated among Lutherans in Germany and involves lighting one candle for each of the four weeks in the Advent season.

The Advent wreath is circular and often is made of evergreens. The circle represents the eternal God, who has no beginning and no end. The evergreens remind us of eternal life in Jesus Christ. The candles around the wreath remind us of Him who is the Light of the World and of our need for the Light in our lives.

Traditionally there are four candles around the edge of the wreath, three purple and one pink. Purple is the color of penitence. If one of the candles is pink instead of purple, it is lit on the third week (the half way point of the season) to encourage us to keep our discipline of preparation and watching. An optional fifth candle (which is white) may be added in the middle and is lit on Christmas Day. During the twelve days of the Christmas Season, all the candles are lit daily until Epiphany, the 6th of January.

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Symbolic significance has sometimes been attributed to the four candles by saying that the first one stands for the light of hope which the prophets held out for the promised Messiah; the second one symbolizes the light and warmth Joseph and Mary found in the stable; the third reminds us of the light the shepherds saw at the announcement of Jesus' birth; the fourth candle tells us of the light of the star that led the Wise Men to the infant Jesus.



Christmas decorations in the home should be deferred until as close to Christmas Eve as possible. The manger scene may add one or two figures each week, not adding the Christ Child until Christmas Eve. The three magi may be moved closer and closer to the scene each day following Christmas, but do not arrive until Epiphany.

The celebration of Christmas should wait until Christmas and the Twelve Days of Christmas (25 December through 6 January). All Christmas decorations should remain up during this time. Parties prior to 25 December are appropriately celebrated as Advent parties.

THE CEREMONY OF THE ADVENT WREATH

The ceremony is simple. It should be kept that way. It is for every member of the family, not just the young, nor just the adults. It is a religious service for the whole family.



The prayer and the lighting of the candle should precede the daily family meal together. The lessons may be read before or after the meal.

FIRST WEEK: (2 - 8 December 2007)

The head of the house says the prayer.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



The first purple candle is lit. The lesson may be read here or following the meal. Then grace is said for the meal.

LESSONS: Sunday, John 1:9-14,16,17; Monday, John 3:16-21; Tuesday, Isaiah 60:1-2; Wednesday, Psalm 43:3-5; Thursday, Isaiah 58:6-9; Friday, I John 2:8-11; Saturday, I John 3:1-2,7-10. A concluding prayer and song may follow.

SECOND WEEK: (9 - 15 December 2007)

Another member of the family says the prayer and the grace.

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Now, two purple candles are lit. The lesson and the grace follow.

LESSONS: Sunday, Isaiah 40:1-5; Monday, Genesis 3:1-7; Tuesday, Genesis, 3:8-13,22-23; Wednesday, Hosea 11:3-4; Thursday, Psalm 130; Friday, Micah 6:6-8, Saturday, Jeremiah 14:8-9. A concluding prayer and song may follow.

THIRD WEEK: (16 - 22 December 2007)

Another member of the family offers the prayer and the grace.



Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Three candles, including the pink one, are lit.

LESSONS: Sunday, Isaiah 9:6-7; Monday, Isaiah 7:10-14; Tuesday, Isaiah 11:1-6; Wednesday, Isaiah 40:10-11; Thursday, Isaiah 52:7, Friday, Jeremiah 33:14-16; Saturday, Malachi 3:1-2. A concluding prayer and song may follow.

FOURTH WEEK: (23 - 24 December 2007)

First one member of the family, then another might offer the prayers or read the Bible throughout the week. Then follows this collect and the grace.



Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

All four candles are lit.

LESSON: Sunday, Matthew 1:18-25; Monday, Luke 1:26-33. A concluding prayer and song may follow.

CHRIST-MASS EVE OR CHRIST-MASS DAY: The colored candles may be changed to festive white and the center "Christ Candle", is lit. The Christ-mass story from Luke 2:1-14 is read and the Collect for the Christ-mass is offered. Carols are sung. Make this a time for the family to be together. The wreath may be used throughout the Christ-mass season as a joyful reminder that God has kept his promises.