

The Humble Advent Wreath

The lighting of the Advent wreath in the family home is a beautiful, time-honoured Christian tradition. But perhaps it needs revitalization in today's climate.

The Advent wreath has many advantages as a starting point for rediscovering the spiritual 'centre' of our lives, for getting in touch with God and with one another.

First, the wreath has its own aesthetic beauty. The flicker of candle light over green foliage and pine cones in a darkened room, makes an attractive focus. It holds gentle power to stir hearts, touch the imagination and create an atmosphere of harmony and romance.

Secondly, creating the Advent wreath involves a practical, hands-on task. This in itself is an opportunity to involve young children, to enjoy some precious time with them and to create positive family memories to last a lifetime.

Thirdly, the Advent wreath speaks to us through symbols. It bears a Christ message which we can talk about with our children as we set it up and light the candles week by week. It helps us to anticipate the sacred events of Christmas and links us to our ancestors in faith. Generations of Christians have lit the Advent wreath. Sharing in that same faith, we do the same.

Finally, the Advent wreath is a call to prayer. Families traditionally light the wreath at

dinner time. Its circular shape suggests a gathering motion, a gathering of bodies, hearts and voices which we offer to God in prayer. Our prayers can be formal or spontaneous.

Of course, to appreciate the Advent wreath as a family prayer experience requires a little thought, preparation and time. But that is the point. The wreath calls us to create that spiritual space in our lives, to anticipate the birth of Emmanuel (God-with-us). Even in our 'trying' God is with us.

In speaking with families about faith rituals in the home, I have heard some beautiful testimonies relating to the Advent wreath. If you are looking for an Advent focus this year, perhaps the humble wreath is the place to start.

How to make an Advent wreath (the basics):

- On a round plate place four candles - three purple and one pink. Place some thick green foliage around the base of each candle. If you wish, add some pine cones, nuts and decorative ribbon.
- Symbols of the Advent wreath:
 - The circle of the wreath reminds us of God's eternity.
 - Green leaves remind us of the new life Jesus brings.
 - The four candles symbolize the four weeks of Advent.
 - The lighting of the candles reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world, bringing newness, hope to our lives.
- First candle: traditionally a sign of hope in expectation of the coming of the Messiah.
- Third candle (pink/rose): joy.
- The other two candles may be associated with themes like peace or love.
- On Christmas day, light a single white candle (placed in the centre of the wreath).

