

The Advent Wreath



The lighting of the Advent wreath in the family home is a beautiful, time-honoured Christian tradition.

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, some beautiful testimonies can be heard relating to the Advent wreath. If you are looking for an Advent focus this year, perhaps the humble wreath is the place to start.

A reflection from a young family

'In our home the advent wreath is an important part of our Christmas preparations. The children love collecting the branches and pine cones and never cease to come up with a new decorative feature each year. At times I have to bite my tongue as some gaudy flower is stuck on at an odd angle. But it is all part of their making this tradition their own. The wreath adds something special to our family meal table and helps us to pray together. Sometimes there are fights and tears about whose turn it is to blow out the candles. But this is all part of learning to share. I have fond memories of lighting of the advent wreath in my own childhood. My hope is to give my children similar special memories.'
(Frances)

How to make an Advent wreath:

- 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 and 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).

For more about the Advent wreath, its history and customs see:

www.catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0132.html

www.cptryon.org/prayer/adx/adwreath.html

www.americancatholic.org/Features/Advent/adventcustoms.asp