



At our recent Advent wreath –making several people were not sure of the symbolism of the wreath or how it can be a really useful way of bringing us back to the real focus of this season. So here are a few thoughts but please look online for more; there are lots of children's and families' activities for Advent.

http://www.going4growth.com/growth_through_the_year/advent/advent_wreaths

Advent marks the start of the Christmas season. It begins on the Sunday nearest November 30, the feast day of St. Andrew the Apostle, and lasts four Sundays. The date it begins changes from year to year. As a result, so does the length of each Advent season. **This year the first Sunday in Advent is Sunday, November 27th 2016.**

The word advent, from Latin, means "the coming." It is a time of spiritual reflection as well as anticipation- we're getting ready!

Marking this season can be a great way to be real about your faith with your family.

For each of the four Sundays of Advent you can get together and

- * light the candle/s in an Advent wreath,
- * read Bible verses or a short prayer (suggestions below/attached)
- * sing a Christmas song or carol,
- * ask a 'wondering' question e.g. "I wonder what Mary thought, what the weather was like, if baby Jesus wriggled a lot...." or discussions questions, "How long would it take someone to walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem?"

If your children are older, pick a leader for every week. The leader can then select the format they want the lighting ceremony to take. Often the lighting of the candles is before lunch/dinner or right after sunset. The candle lighting is progressive from week to week, symbolising the journey, preparing the way for the coming of Jesus.

Symbolism of the Advent wreath

The wreath should be in a circle, a symbol of eternity, and a reminder that God has neither beginning nor end.

The evergreen is a symbol of eternal life and a reminder that God is immutable or unchangeable.

Fastened to the wreath are four candles standing upright, at equal distances. These candles represent the four weeks of Advent. Three of the candles are purple, reminding us of the reflective nature of the season. A rose or pink candle is lit for the Third Sunday of Advent, also known as Gaudete (rejoice) Sunday. The name is taken from the entrance antiphon or Introit "Rejoice (gaudete) in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice." It is reminding us that the end of Advent is almost here, and we can hardly contain our joy.

Often a fifth candle (white) is added to the centre of the wreath for lighting on Christmas Eve, in celebration of the birth of Jesus- the Christ Candle.

This sacramental is rich in meaning, is easy to implement and can either be simple, costing little, or very elaborate, costing more, handmade or shop-bought, with fresh greenery, or permanent decorations eg metal, wood or made of pine cones.

First Sunday of Advent: Hope

light one purple candle to symbolize Hope

Prayer Jesus, you are light even in the darkest places.

Help us to trust in you when we are lost or lonely.

Shine hope into our hearts.

Amen.

Read Isaiah 60:2-3

Second Sunday: Peace

Light the hope candle and then another purple candle - Hope and Peace

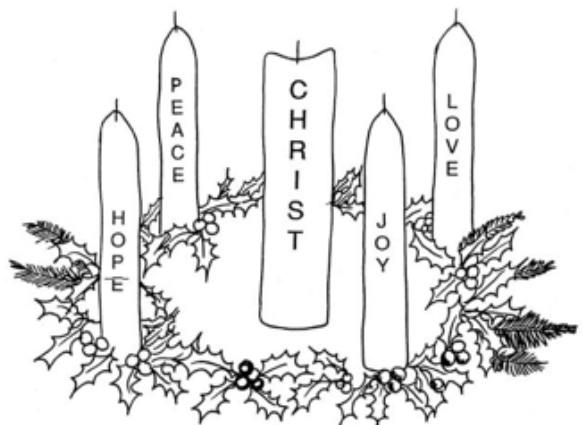
Prayer Jesus, you are peace even when there is hatred.

Help us to forgive like you when we are hurt or wounded.

Bring peace into our hearts.

Amen

Read Mark 1:4



Third Sunday : Joy

Light two purple candles (Hope and Peace) and one rose to symbolize Joy

Prayer Jesus, you are joy even in the saddest times.

Help us to praise and thank you when we are upset or sad.

Shine joy into our hearts.

Amen.

Read Isaiah 35:10



Fourth Sunday: Love

light all four candles - Hope, Peace, Joy and Love

Prayer Jesus, you are love even if we are afraid.

Help us to pray to you when we are scared or fearful.

Bring love into our hearts.

Amen.

Read Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas Eve

Light all four candles and add the fifth white candle(the light of Christ)

Prayer Jesus, you came to be light in our darkness.

Jesus, you came to be the peace in our conflicts.

Jesus, you came to be the joy in our sadness,

and to bring your love in our fears.

Today we celebrate your birth.

Thank you for your saving grace.

Amen.

Read Luke 1:68-79 and Luke 2:1-20

Keep the candles lit a bit longer



How to make an Advent wreath:

1. The Base:

a) twigs of flexible yew, pine, larch etc about 50cm ,wound into a wreath with florists' wire.

b) oasis shaped into a wreath form This foam usually comes shaped (about £3.50)with a waterproof container. cut the foliage to cover the damp oasis, remembering to spray the wreath occasionally.

c) vine Wreath form You can use vines from wisteria, grape, cane or willow. Pre-soak or moisturise the vine ahead of time, because the vine must be pliable to be able to curl into a wreath.

d) styrofoam, straw, or some other type of wreath form you can find a variety of wreath forms available in different materials at craft shops. Styrofoam is the most readily available and the least expensive. There are also straw forms, either wrapped in plastic or wire bound to keep the straw from falling out. Any of these forms do not provide any moisture for the live evergreens. Unless you are using permanent greens, expect to either change the greens every so often, or have a very dead wreath by Christmas!

e) wire frame There are several types of ready-made wreath wire-forms you can purchase (£2), or you could form your own out of strong wire, or even coat hangers. You can also buy an actual Advent wreath form, consisting of a simple ring and candleholders.

f) Ready-made Christmas Wreath You can purchase a ready-made Christmas wreath, either artificial or live!

2. Candleholders

a) florist candleholders These are usually inexpensive plastic green holders, available at any craft or garden store or florist shop. If using foam or moss type form, these can be inserted directly into the form. Otherwise, these need to be securely fastened to the wreath with florist wire or hot glue.

b) spikes For the moss or foam forms, large nails or spikes can be inserted on the underside of the wreath so that the pointed side comes through the top, high enough to put your candles. The spike cannot be too wide, otherwise it will split and break your candle. If you use a large pillar candle, this option would be ideal.

c) toothpicks & florist tape. Tape 2-4 toothpicks to the base of the candle. This has to be very tight, with no movement for the candle. Then place the candles in position into the wreath, covering the tape & sticks with foliage.

3. Greenery

The choice is endless: yew, any type of pine, cedar, fir, laurel, holly, boxwood, spruce, hemlock, balsam twigs, even magnolia leaves can give an interesting look. Use what is available in your area, what is easy to manage, and what appeals to you.

The way your greens are cut depends on what type of base. If you just have a wire frame, you need to have branches that you can wire together and attach by florist wire onto the frame. If using forms, like foam, you can have small twigs or leaves and attach them to florist picks and insert throughout, or if the branches or leaves are sturdy enough, insert them without picks.

Place them in the same direction, covering up the bare woody stem of the previous green with the leaves of the next one. The whole base should be covered with greenery.

There is a spray preparation you can add to your leaves to make them non-flammable, available from craft shops or floristry retailers online.

4. Candles

the candles are either tall taper candles or stubby pillar candles. They are traditionally 3 purple/violet and 1 pink but you can use whatever fits your décor: white/gold/blue/silver/red. **You usually only burn them on the Sunday during the family's main meal** so by Christmas Eve the first one is very low, the second and third are smaller and the fourth is still just used! If you want to burn them every day, you will need to replace them.

Most candles are paraffin, which burn quickly and drip. If you can find them, beeswax candles burn cleanly and smell wonderful.

I have found that the length of the flame gets longer with the price of the candle! As you continue this tradition through the years, just keep an eye out for bargains and New Year sales on purple and pink candles.

5. Ribbons and Decorations

Pine cones, seed pods (star of anise), cinnamon 'sticks', nuts, dried citrus slices, crab apples and red berries can be added to the greens. You could suspend the wreath with purple ribbons or place it on a runner/mat/plate on the table. Add some Christmas balls or other wooden/handmade decorations to your taste.