



On your marks

The Advent wreath decorated with four or five candles symbolises the passage of the four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas. It is one of the few ceremonies that can be kept in the home as well as in church and can involve the children in the build-up to Christmas while exploring its meaning. An Advent wreath can be placed on the table and the candles lighted at meals, or anywhere in the home where the family gathers, with a simple prayer or brief explanation about the meaning of each candle.

A ring of evergreens decorated with candles was used in ceremonies in northern Europe long before the arrival of Christianity. The circle symbolised the eternal cycle of the seasons while the evergreens and lighted candles was a sign of the endurance of life in the midst of winter. A circular ring - given a Christian meaning - may have been used in the Middle Ages but the Advent wreath probably dates from the German Protestant church in the 19th century.

Get set

Evergreens are a symbol of everlasting life and the circle represents God's eternity and unity. The first candle is lit on Advent Sunday and another candle on each of the following Sundays until the final 'Christ' candle in the centre of the wreath is lit on Christmas Day. The build-up of light is an expression of the growing anticipation of the birth of [Jesus Christ](#), the light of the world.

The most common colour for the candles is to have three purple and one rose. Purple is the traditional colour for Advent. It is also the colour of royalty, as we await the coming of the Prince of Peace. Rose is used for the Third Sunday of Advent, known as [Gaudete Sunday](#), from the Latin word for 'rejoice'. It anticipates the joy of Christmas so its colour is a mixture of Advent purple and Christmas white. The 'Christ' candle in the centre is always white.

Some churches use only purple candles. Others use bright blue candles to symbolise the night sky, anticipating the announcement of Jesus' birth or the water of creation (Genesis 1:1-10). A few churches have red candles but there is no symbolical reason for this.

A common pattern is for the candles to represent the Patriarchs, Prophets, John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. There are several other variations and they sometimes represent Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. The following readings and prayers incorporate both sequences.

Go!

Lighting the candles

Display the wreath where it is visible but also accessible for children to light it. By giving each child just one candle to light, up to eleven children can take part through the season.



Advent Sunday

Introduction

We light our first Advent candle to remind us of Abraham, our father in faith, and the patriarchs of old who followed him in search of the Promised Land. *(The first candle is lit.)*

Reading

Genesis 12:1-4a

Prayer

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, you are God of the whole universe and we can call you 'Father'. You have revealed their hope of the Messiah to us in Jesus Christ: Son of God, son of David and son of Mary. Help us to prepare ourselves to celebrate his birth and to follow him faithfully every day of our lives until we each our home in heaven. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the hope for the world.

The Second Sunday of Advent

Introduction

Our second Advent candle reminds us of the prophets who foretold the coming of the Saviour and his reign of righteousness and peace. *(The first and second candles are lit.)*

Reading

Isaiah 9:6-7

Prayer

God our Father, you spoke through the prophets to foretell the birth of the Prince of Peace and spread the news of the coming of his kingdom. Help us, as we prepare to celebrate his birth, to share with all who we meet the good news of your love and power. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light for the world.

The Third Sunday of Advent

Introduction

Our third Advent candle reminds us of John the Baptist who prepared the way of the Lord and heralded the coming of Jesus. *(The first, second and third candles are lit.)*

Reading



Isaiah 11:1-5, 9b

Prayer

God our Father, your servants Zechariah and Elizabeth rejoiced at the birth of their son, John. He prepared people for the way of the Lord and baptised them in the river Jordan to wash away their sins.

Help us, who have been baptised in Christ, to welcome him joyfully into our hearts and to grow strong in faith. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who brought joy to the world.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Introduction

Our fourth Advent candle reminds us of Mary, mother of the Lord. (*The four candles are lit.*)

Reading

Luke 1:26-33, 38

Prayer

God our father, the angel Gabriel told your servant Mary that she was to be the mother of your Son. Though she was afraid, she responded 'Yes' to your call.

Help us, who you have called to be your disciples, to recognise your voice, trust you and willingly respond, 'Yes' to your will for us. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and the Prince of Peace.

Christmas Day

Introduction (as all the candles are lit)

Today a Saviour has been born for us. He is Christ the Lord!

Prayer

God our Father, today we greet the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ with joy.

Help us to live in his light and to share the good news of your love to the whole world.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Saviour, the Word made flesh, who lived among us.