

The Advent Wreath – Why light candles at Advent?

In years gone by, before every street was filled with electric light, people used to light a candle and place it in the window of a house so that travellers coming home on a dark night would know which way to go in the dark. Sometimes one of the household would have to go away for a long time - perhaps because he had to serve in the army or go on a sea voyage. Then a candle would be kept alight all the time he was gone as a sign of hope and expectation that he would return.



The tradition of the Advent wreath started in Germany in the 19th century and spread to this country around the 1960's. So, what is the significance of the Advent Wreath?

1. It is a symbol of our preparation for Christmas. It helps us get ready for Christmas. That preparation is carried out by lighting one candle each week of Advent.
2. It is round, so is an unending circle with no beginning or end. It represents our love for God and our friendship with each other, and that love and friendship never end so we are going round and round the circle – rather like the rope around the world scout badge.
3. It is made from evergreen leaves which come from plants and trees that never lose their leaves: they are always green and this represents our commitment to Jesus and the things he taught and also our love for him.
4. There are four candles which we light during Advent before Christmas. The **first** candle represents hope: hope that we can create a better world. We light this during the first week of Advent.
5. The **second** candle represents faith. God's prophets have talked about justice and peace and we need to believe and have faith that this can be achieved in time. We light this candle in the second week of Advent.
6. The **third** candle represents John the Baptist, the messenger who told the world about the change that would come when Jesus came. We are the messengers who need to talk about that change. We light this candle in the third week of Advent.
7. The **fourth** candle represents Mary who said 'Yes' to God's challenge, accepting the pain and joy of the challenge. We are joyful at Christmas because of the birth of Jesus. We light this candle in the fourth week of Advent.
8. The **fifth** candle, in the centre, is the climax when we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus. This candle stands for Jesus because he is the light of the world. He came at Christmas and helped us to learn from his teaching the right way to live. We light this candle on Christmas Day to celebrate his coming.

Prayers

Father God, thank you for this time of Advent, this time of preparing, this time of thinking what Christmas is all about..... why you sent your Son, why the wise men wandered, why the star shone brightly, why the angels sang beautifully, why the shepherds ran delightedly, why the world was waiting expectantly. Amen.

A candle burns, a sign of our hope. God of hope, come to us again this Advent. May we share hope with others at this happy time of year. May that hope that Jesus brings be in us, burning as a shining light in our lives. Amen.

Dear God, we thank you for the special time of Advent, a special time of waiting and preparation. Help us, while we go about our preparations, to make time to think of the gift of Jesus that you gave to us at the first Christmas. Amen.