

Faith in Five – Adults Advent



Advent stems from "ad-venire" in Latin or "to come to". **The Advent season is a time of preparation.** Beginning one week after the Solemnity of Christ the King, and encompassing four Sundays, the period of Advent helps to celebrate the coming of the Lord.

1. There are ways to mark the countdown of days to Christmas, but many use secular themes and lack references to Jesus and His birth. A popular practice of the season is the Advent wreath, which started as a Catholic tradition and has been adopted by other Christian religions. At church, these candles are lit before the celebration of the Holy Mass during the Advent season, with the exception of the first Sunday when the wreath is blessed at the beginning of Mass. At home throughout the Advent season, the wreath is kept on display. The candles may be lit in the evening and prayers are offered. The candles then remain lit during the evening meal. In general, the sequence is as follows:
 - a. **First Week of Advent** - Bless the wreath, light one purple candle and offer up prayer.
 - b. **Second Week of Advent** - Light two purple candles and offer up prayer.
 - c. **Third Week of Advent** - Light two purple candles, one pink candle, and offer up prayer.
 - d. **Fourth Week of Advent** - Light all the candles and offer up prayer.

The prayers change each week as the season progresses. There are a wealth of ideas and variations using the Advent wreath, allowing families to create their own special traditions at home. Just as there are many ideas, there are various interpretations of what each candle on the Advent wreath represents. The important thing is that we anticipate with joy the coming of our Lord Jesus!

2. The wreath is made of evergreen branches in the form of a circle. This symbolizes eternity, where the circle has no beginning or end point. It also symbolizes God's infinite love for us! The lights of each candle represent the Light of Christ which grows brighter as Christmas draws near. The purple candles symbolize prayer, penance and the royal Kingship of Christ; the rose candle represents joy. Each candle represents 1000 years, a total of 4000 years the world waited for the coming of Jesus.



3. The first candle is known as the **Prophecy Candle** or **Candle of Hope**. We know God is faithful to us and keeps His promises. Throughout the ages, God promised to send us a Savior, the Messiah. Our hope remains in God alone.



4. The second candle is known as the **Bethlehem Candle** or the **Candle of Preparation or Faith**. It is a reminder of Mary and Joseph's faith in God, as they journeyed to Bethlehem. God kept His promise that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. We prepare ourselves to welcome the Lord!



5. The third candle is the **Shepard Candle** or the **Candle of Joy**.
Rose is the liturgical color for joy. This Sunday is also known as Gaudete Sunday, which reminds us of the joyful anticipation of what is to come!



6. The fourth candle is known as the **Angel Candle** or the **Candle of Love or Peace**.
God's great Love is finally manifested in the birth of our Savior!
The angels proclaim, 'Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to people of good will'.



On Christmas Eve or Christmas day, people may include a **Christ candle** on their wreath. The Christ Candle is white, symbolizing Christ's purity and is placed at the center of the Advent wreath. The Christ candle is a more recent addition to the Advent wreath and may be used throughout the year for special occasions.



→ [Sample Guide and Prayers for the Daily Lighting of the Advent Wreath at home](#)

7. Spiritual Preparation for Advent

- a. Confession** – since Catholics are encouraged to go to confession at least twice a year, many choose to do this before Easter and Christmas. Parishes may offer communal penance services during this time. This is an incredible way to prepare to receive Jesus by acknowledging our sins in order to fully experience His love for us at Christmas!
- b. Eucharistic Adoration** – though not a strictly Advent practice, time spent with the Lord opens us up to receive Him with great joy.
- c. Advent Examen** – similar to the Daily Examen, this helps us reflect daily and prepare for the Lord, but from the perspective of the Christ-child ([Source](#))
- d. Scriptures and devotional books for Advent** – We can prepare spiritually by setting aside time to read, pray and meditate. Advent devotionals offer daily reflections and prayers to open up our minds and hearts to the coming Lord. One way to use the Bible is to read the Gospel of Luke, beginning with the first chapter on December 1st. Reading one chapter a day, Luke's gospel concludes on Christmas Day. The first few chapters of Luke's gospel focus on Mary's role and includes seven stories pertaining to events surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood.

→ [Extensive Advent resources: calendars, retreats, prayers, blessings and reflections](#)

8. Other Advent Traditions popular in the Catholic Church



- a. Las Posadas** – celebrated in Latin American cultures, this is a nightly reenactment of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter before the birth of Jesus, traditionally celebrated December 16-24. With songs, children dressed as Mary and Joseph, perform the act of knocking on the door of a house or church requesting "posada" (lodging). This continues until one door is finally opened, welcoming the holy pilgrims and accompanying crowd. The rosary is recited along with prayers, and afterwards, traditional food is shared.
- b.** The final days of Advent, from December 17 to December 24, the "**O**" **Antiphons** are sung during this period and have been by the Church since at least the eighth century.



Each of the antiphons begin with "O", followed by an image or title given by the Jewish people to the future Messiah: "O Wisdom of God", "O Leader of Israel", "O Root of Jesse", "O Key of David", "O Radiant Dawn", "O King of All Nations", "O Emmanuel." The images and titles drawn from the Hebrew scriptures remind

Christians that for them Jewish hopes for a Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Their use of the imperative "Come!" embodies the longing for the Messiah.

c. Nativity Scene or Crèche is a special display of figures and objects present at the



birth of Jesus. Crèche refers specifically to the manger that Christ was placed in. Its origin is traced to St. Francis of Assisi, who made the Christmas crèche or manger for Christmas Eve of 1223. His nativity, however, consisted of live animals, people and a real baby. Just as the Advent wreath is blessed, the Nativity Scene or crèche may also

be blessed for the season. Pope Francis said, "[it is] a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation" which "never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder".

d. Christmas Tree – Legend states that St. Boniface, a Catholic priest in the eighth century, did missionary work in Germany. He left for a long while and returned, only to be distressed to find the people reverting to their idol worship. It is said that St. Boniface cut down the oak dedicated to the pagan god Thor and in its place, an evergreen fir tree grew. St. Boniface explained the fir tree represented the everlasting nature and life of Christ and the tip pointed towards heaven, where the glory of God awaits us.



The Christmas tree tradition was brought to America by Pennsylvania Germans in the 1820s. However, this is a relatively modern tradition in the Catholic Church – it was not until 1982 that a Christmas tree stood in Vatican City, largely because of the belief that this was a Protestant custom. Today, the tree in Vatican City stands beside the grand crib in St Peter's Square, a gift each year from a different nation. In our homes, the Christmas tree is set up some time before Christmas and may remain in place until The Solemnity of the Epiphany.

9. Advent prepares us not just for the Lord's birth at Christmas, but also to His second coming at the end of time. "From the earliest days of the Church, people have been fascinated by Jesus' promise to come back. But the scripture readings during Advent tell us not to waste our time with predictions. Our Advent readings call us to be alert and ready, not weighted down and distracted by the cares of this world (Luke 21:34-36). Like Lent, the liturgical color for Advent is purple since both are seasons that prepare us for great feast days. Advent also includes an element of penance in the sense of preparing, quieting, and disciplining our hearts for the full joy of Christmas" ([USCCB](http://USCCB.org)).

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