

The Advent Wreath is part of our long-standing Catholic and Christian tradition. However, the actual origins are uncertain. There is evidence of pre-Christian Germanic peoples using wreathes with lit candles during the cold and dark December days as a sign of hope in the future warm and extended-sunlight days of Spring. By the Middle Ages, the Christians adapted this tradition and used Advent wreathes as part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas.

The symbolism of the Advent wreath is beautiful. The wreath is made of various evergreens, signifying continuous life. Even these evergreens have a traditional meaning which can be adapted to our faith: The laurel signifies victory over persecution and suffering; pine, holly, and yew, immortality; and cedar, strength and healing. Holly also has a special Christian symbolism: The prickly leaves remind us of the crown of thorns, and one English legend tells of how the cross was made of holly. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life found in Christ. Any pinecones, nuts, or seedpods used to decorate the wreath also symbolize life and resurrection.

Altogether, the wreath of evergreens depicts the immortality of our soul and the new, everlasting life promised to us through Christ, the eternal Word of the Father, who entered our world becoming true man and who was victorious over sin and death through His own passion, death, and resurrection. The Circle of metal on which the wreath is wound contains a cross reminding us of that passion.

The four outer candles represent the four weeks of Advent. In the Catholic tradition we use different colours for the candles. Whilst other traditions have 4 red candles, we use three candles that are purple and one that is rose. The purple candles symbolize the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and good works undertaken at this time. Purple is the liturgical colour of Lent as well as Advent and this colour reminds us in Advent that we must prepare for His coming by turning away from Sin and towards Him.

The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, when the priest also wears rose vestments at Mass; Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday of rejoicing, because the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent - preparation is now half over and they are close to Christmas. It represents a shift from the more penitential mood of the first two weeks to one of joyful anticipation. The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of His second coming to judge the living and the dead. A white candle placed in the middle of the wreath (on the Cross), which represents Christ and is lit on Christmas Eve. The light of which signifies Christ, the Light of the world.

Advent is a special season in the life of the Church let's make it part of our life - even when the secular world has already started to celebrate Christmas!

God bless, RAY