



The Advent Wreath

The origin of the Advent wreath stems from Lutheran Germanic folk ancestry. In eastern Europe, during the cold and dark December, families would light fires and gather wreaths of evergreen to signify the hope of an early spring and renewed life, light, and warmth. By the early sixteenth century, Germanic Lutherans adopted the symbolic tradition, but used it instead as a celebration in the hope of Christ. The season of Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas. It is a season of preparation; a solemn time to make ready for the coming of Christ and Christmas. It begins on the Sunday closest to November 30th, and it lasts for four Sundays.

Originally, the Advent wreath consisted of four candles, three purple and one rose-colored. However, the use of four white candles is also an accepted practice. Today, some churches use blue, a color of hope, in place of purple to distinguish from the use of purple during Lent. Some wreaths have a larger, central fifth candle, the Christ Candle, which is lit on Christmas Day to signify Christ's birth.

Each candle has a specific meaning associated with different aspects of the Advent story. The first candle symbolizes expectant hope and is associated with prophecy. The others are organized around themes as a way to unfold the story and direct attention to the celebrations and worship in the season. These candles are symbols of peace, love, and joy.

There is a different set of meanings associated with the four Advent candles. The first candle is called the prophet's candle and is meant to signify the hope of Jesus' arrival. The second is the Bethlehem candle, reminding us that God appeared to us in a humble manner. The third candle is the shepherd's candle, representing joy. The final candle is the angels' candle, symbolizing the message of good news that they offer.

Advent, a season of preparation and waiting, can serve as a quiet time to reflect on the promises of God and to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. As the prophet Jeremiah says in Lamentations 3: 26, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."