

THE ADVENT WREATH

We know that ADVENT means COMING, and we know that Christmas is coming, but the season of Advent reminds us there is more to Christmas preparations than gift lists, frantic shopping, school plays and party schedules, etc. All the December activities make it easy to put off preparing our hearts for the true meaning of our Christmas celebration. The Advent wreath helps us keep a balance in our lives during the weeks of expectancy.

The tradition of the family gathered around the table before a meal, lighting Advent candles, saying Advent prayers and sharing appropriate readings helps us to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ Child -- as for many centuries God prepared the world for the birth of Jesus. The circle of the wreath reminds us that God has no beginning and no end. The evergreens represent the promise of eternal life. The candles represent Jesus' overcoming the darkness of hatred and evil with the light of joy and love.

The brief ritual described below, and on the following pages, is to be used each evening when the family gathers, beginning on the first of the four Sundays in Advent and continuing each day of the week. Adapt it if you like to include other prayers and verses. Some prefer to use "Advent Blue" candles. Other traditions use red or white. You may also choose to add a white "Christ candle" in the center to light on Christmas Eve.

THE FIRST WEEK IN ADVENT

A family member lights one (only) purple candle, saying: "I light this candle to remind us that we must prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ Child."

COLLECT for the first week in Advent (said by all):

"Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your son, Jesus Christ, came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."

(Book of Common Prayer, page 211)

Read: Isaiah 9: 1-7

Read or Sing:

"Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.

"Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art: dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

"Born they people to deliver, born a child, and yet a king, born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.

"By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne."

(Hymn 66)

THE SECOND WEEK IN ADVENT

A member of the family lights last week's candle and then another purple one, saying: "I light these candles to remind us that we must prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ Child."

COLLECT for the second week in Advent:

"Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."

(BCP p. 211)

Read: St. Matthew 3: 1-3

Read or Sing:

"On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh; awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings of the King of kings..."

(Hymn 76)

Prayer :

Dear Christ, the light of all who love you, help us to make ready for Your birthday by preparing room for you in our hearts. Let no selfishness of ours darken our homes. Let no ill feelings spoil the joy of being together. Draw us closer by showing us how to truly love and serve you. Amen.

THE THIRD WEEK IN ADVENT

A family member lights the two purple candles and the rose (pink) one (a symbol of joy), saying: "I light these candles to remind us that we must prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ Child." (The pink candle symbolizes joy in the midst of waiting.)

COLLECT for the third week in Advent:

"Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen."
(*BCP* p. 212)

Read: St. Luke 1: 26-33, 38

Read or Sing:

"The King shall come when morning dawns and light triumphant
breaks; when beauty gilds the eastern hills and life to joy awakes.

"Not, as of old, a little child, to bear, and fight, and die, but crowned
with glory like the sun that lights the morning sky..."
(Hymn 73)

Prayer:

Dear God, bless our family. Help us make our home a happy place
for you. Be with us in all we do together that we may please You. Amen.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LIGHT THE FIRST THREE CANDLES AND THEN THE FOURTH, saying: "I light these candles to remind us that we must prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ Child."

COLLECT for the fourth Sunday in Advent:

"Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at His coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for Himself; and forever. Amen.
(BCP p. 212)

Read: St. Luke 2: 1 - 20

Read or sing:

"Once he came in blessing, all our ills redressing; came in likeness lowly, Son of God most holy; bore the cross to save us, hope and freedom gave us.

"Still he comes within us, still his voice would win us from the sins that hurt us, would to Truth convert us: not in torment hold us, but in love enfold us.

"Thus, if thou canst name him, not ashamed to claim him, but wilt trust him boldly nor dost love him coldly, he will then receive thee, heal thee, and forgive thee.

"One who thus endureth bright reward secureth. Come, then, O Lord Jesus, from our sins release us; let us here confess thee till in heaven we bless thee."

(Hymn 53)

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, the Son of God, our Father, born in a stable among the oxen and sheep because there was no room in the inn; come into our hearts and dwell in them forever. Help us to cast out all that is unworthy of Your Holy Presence. Grant that the peace and good of which the angels sang may shine forth in our lives. Amen.

"O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel! Amen."

(Hymn 78)