

A Centerpiece for Prayer

Greetings!

With the approach of Advent, many families may be considering whether to purchase or make an Advent wreath. The wreath can easily be a family project, and depending on the time members have, it can be decorated simply or elaborately. No matter the amount of decor, the Advent wreath will provide a centerpiece for your family's seasonal prayer.

The tradition of the candles in a wreath dates back to the time of the Roman Empire, although their use did not become common until the Middle Ages and afterward. Advent wreaths were popularized, in part, by Martin Luther as a family custom, and their use is embraced by Lutherans as well as Catholics today.

An Advent wreath is usually a circle of evergreens. The symbol of the circle is a reminder that God has no beginning and no end, and that our souls are immortal. The green color of the wreath's branches, which have retained their color long after other trees and shrubs have shed their leaves, reminds us of the eternal life we have found in Christ.

We who walk in darkness will see a great light.

In the wreath's circle are four candles: three purple (or violet) and one rose (or pink) candle. These four candles represent the number of Sundays during Advent.

In antiquity, purple dye was expensive, so that color was reserved for royalty. The purple candles remind us that during Advent, we anticipate the coming of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. The rose candle is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent. The color symbolizes the joy we anticipate while awaiting Christmas, as reflected in the first word of the entrance antiphon: "Rejoice."

To make a wreath, insert evergreen boughs and candles into a Styrofoam® frame or arrange boughs on a table around four candle holders. The evergreen branches can be fresh holly, yew, pine, or fir. (Some people use branches clipped from their Christmas tree.) The boughs also can be artificial, purchased from a local craft store.

Most home Advent wreaths are small enough for the dining table. Many families use the candle lighting, along with a prayer or song, as their table grace during this season.



The purple candles of the Advent wreath recall that we await the King of Kings.

My children, for example, learned the many verses of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" singing at our kitchen table as the weeks of Advent progressed. Parishes often provide prayers for around the Advent wreath in the bulletin.

The lighting of the candles builds from week to week. In the first week, the first candle is lit each night, and each week afterwards, an additional candle is lit until all four candles are lit on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. As the successive number of candles are lit, the light continues to increase, and the darkness fades as the coming of the one who is the Light of the World is anticipated. Our Advent home observance reminds us that we who walk in darkness will see a great light.