

THE ADVENT WREATH 2023

The Advent Wreath is probably the most popular symbol of Advent. It helps us to remember that the word "advent" means coming. During the season of Advent, we wait in anticipation for the birth of Jesus. Bright candles dominate the wreath, symbols of the Light of the World who overcomes the darkness and warms a weary world. The traditional circular wreath reminds us that God, like the circle, has no beginning and no end. Evergreens on the wreath symbolize our everlasting relationship with God, the source of continuous new life. The four candles signify the four weeks in Advent. Lit week by week, first one, then two, three, and finally four candles at a time, three of the candles are purple or royal blue, signifying royalty and hope as the people of God look forward to Christ's coming, and one candle is pink or rose colored. This candle has always been connected with joy, because the third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday (*gaudete* means rejoice in Latin). You may also choose to add a white "Christ candle" in the center to light on Christmas Eve. Other than signifying the progression of the weeks of Advent, the meaning of each candle has multiple traditions ~ each of which are fun to use.

The brief service for each week is to be used either weekly or daily as you gather around the table during the four weeks of Advent. Feel free to adapt or add readings and prayers or share time with your family.

THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

A family member lights one (only) purple or blue 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 of 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." (BCP: 211)

Read: Isaiah 9: 2-3, 6-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. You have made the nation great; you have increased its joy. They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest, as those who divide plunder rejoice. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be vast authority and endless peace for David's throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever. The zeal of the LORD of heavenly forces will do this.

Read or Sing Hymn 66 together

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 thy 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."

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

A family member lights two purple or blue candles, 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 of Advent (said by all):

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 for ever. Amen. (BCP: 211)

Read Matthew 3:1-3

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Read or sing Hymn 76 together

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.

Then cleansed be every breast from sin; make straight the way for God within,
and let each heart prepare a home where such a mighty guest may come.

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 OF ADVENT

A family member lights two purple or blue candles and one pink one for a total of 3 candles, saying: "I light these candles to remind us that we must prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ Child."

COLLECT for the Third Week of Advent (Said by all)

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 for ever. Amen.

Read Luke 1:26-38

When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I am a virgin?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God." Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Read or Sing Hymn 56, vv. 1,4,5 together

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Branch of Jesse's tree, free them from Satan's tyranny
that trust thy mighty power to save, and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

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 WEEK OF ADVENT

A family member lights three purple or blue candles and one pink one for a total of 4 candles, 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 Week of Advent (Said by all)

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; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Read Luke 2:1-14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

Read or Sing Hymn 56, vv 6, 7, 8 together

O come, thou Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind;
bid thou our sad divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

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.

Coda

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel! Amen. (From Hymn 78)