

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas. It begins four Sundays before December 25 and is a time of preparation and expectation. Advent wreaths were originally part of folk traditions of Northern Europe.

Wreaths of evergreens were decorated with candles to symbolize life and light during the dark months of winter. Legend has it that Saint Boniface first gave the wreath its' Christian meaning in the eighth century, and we have been using these wreaths as part of our Advent preparation ever since.

The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God. The evergreens signify continuous life. Each of the four candles represents one of the Sundays of Advent.

As we do in church, it is customary to have an Advent wreath in our homes and to light a candle for each week of Advent. Prayers typically accompany the lighting and this can be done at every evening meal or on the first evening meal of the week.

This is also the time to be creative, not guilty. For the candle lighting, if you don't often gather as a family because dinner time is hectic with activities, create a new tradition and make it a before-bedtime ritual to light a candle and say a few prayers reflecting on the day that has ended. Or if morning works better, start the day with Advent prayers holding in our hearts our hopes for the day ahead and lighting the Advent candle over breakfast.

If you are by yourself, you can create your own ritual, knowing that you are joining with Christians around the world in this sacred season. Instead of sharing out loud, journal your responses to the questions asked during the sharing time.



Advent Wreath

A Guide to Celebrating Advent at Home

St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral
Jackson, Mississippi

Advent Wreath Liturgy

Leader: Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

**The appointed scripture for the week is then read, and all participate in the reflection questions appointed for the week.*

Leader: O come, o come, Emmanuel.

All: **Shine your light into the world.**

Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Leader: Let us pray.

**The appointed prayer for the week is read.*

Leader: Lord God, we light this candle to thank you for shining your light into the world.

**The appointed candle is lit.*

All: **We who sit in darkness have seen a great light.**

Leader: Gracious God, come into our lives each day, and help us prepare our lives for the coming of your Messiah, our Savior, Emmanuel. Thank you for the growing and glowing light of our wreath and for the growing and glowing light in our lives. May that light stir up hope, peace, joy, and love in our hearts so that we may be the light to the world. Amen.

All: **O come, o come, Emmanuel. Shine your light into the world. Amen.**

Week One I Hope

**The first candle is lit.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

Reflection: What do you hope for?

Prayer: Dear God, as we wait for your coming, help us remember that you bring the light of hope into our lives. May that hope be always in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. Amen.

Week Two I Peace

**The first and second candles are lit.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-35

Reflection: Where do you find peace?

Prayer: Dear God, the light of all who love you, give us the peace of Mary, the peace which the angels sang about, and let that peace shine in our lives.. Amen.

Week Three I Joy

**The first, second, and third candles are lit.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:39-45

Reflection: What are you joyful about?

Prayer: Dear God, you bring the light of joy into our lives, stir up that joy in our hearts so that we are lights to others. Amen.

Week Four I Love

**The first, second, third, and fourth candles are lit.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

Reflection: Where in your life do you feel love?

Prayer: Dear God, teach us to love as you love us, and let that love shine out into the world. Amen.

Christmas Eve

**The first, second, third, fourth, and the Christ candles are lit.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Prayer: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.