

# Advent Candles and Advent Wreaths: The History and Meaning, Colors, Symbolism, Themes, and More

During Advent, we prepare for His coming – He who brought Light into the darkness –for four weeks, represented by the four candles around the Advent wreath.

The word “*Advent*” comes from the Latin word “*adventus*,” which means “*a coming, approach, arrival*.” When we expect guests to arrive at our homes, we turn the lights on; we anticipate their arrival and welcome them with joy. In Advent, we prepare our homes and churches as we joyfully anticipate His arrival, and the light also gets brighter as we near Christmas day, the day on which the *Light of the World* was born. St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote,

***“Today, the darkness begins to grow shorter and the light to lengthen, as the hours of light become fewer. [...] Do you see that the beams of light are more intense and the sun higher than it has been? Realize that the true light is now here and, through the rays of the Gospel, is illuminating the whole earth.”***

Advent wreaths and candles are commonly seen in Catholic churches during the liturgical season. Many people also display Advent wreaths in their homes and light a candle each Sunday as families. Read more to learn about the history, traditions, and symbolism behind Advent wreaths and candles and how you can celebrate Advent at home with family and friends.

## Advent wreaths

The Advent wreath is a centuries-old Christian tradition. Potentially overlooked by the candles it holds to light the way for the birth of Jesus, the Advent wreath itself symbolizes many themes and beliefs central to the Christian faith. In parishes, Advent wreaths are placed anywhere on the altar, on a side table, or even hung from the ceiling. In the home, you might place your Advent wreath on an entry or dining table or another location where you, your family, and your guests can enjoy the wreath during the Advent season.

## History of the Advent wreath

The origin of the Advent wreath has been traced back to Germany, though the exact dates are unknown. Historians have suggested that pre-Christian Germanic peoples would light candles around wreaths in the dark winter months in anticipation of the warmer, lighter months in springtime. This tradition likely evolved into an “Advent wreath” at some point during the Middle Ages, transforming the pagan tradition into a Christian one. Rev. William Saunders explained that “By 1600, both Catholics and Lutherans had more formal practices surrounding the Advent wreath.” Ultimately, the Advent wreath tradition spread beyond Germany and into other areas of the world, namely throughout the western Church.

## Advent wreath meaning

The circular shape of the Advent wreath symbolizes God’s infinite love for us –it is never-ending, just like the true Light of the World, Jesus, who leads us into eternal life with Him. The materials of the Advent wreath similarly lead us to reflect on the everlasting nature of God; traditionally, Advent wreaths have been made of evergreen leaves, such as pine or fir, which maintain their green color beyond the season in

which they are collected. Nowadays, there are many modern interpretations of Advent wreaths that still help us celebrate the traditional meaning of the wreath: preparing the way for the Light of the World, Jesus. Battery-operated/LED wreaths are a good example of this as they simulate the four candles but don't require lighting each week.

## Advent candles

The four Advent candles each have meaning.

### What do the four candles of Advent symbolize?

The four candles of Advent represent the four Sundays of Advent, and they respectively symbolize hope, peace, joy, and love. In some homes and parishes, people will also light a fifth candle on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to represent the birth of Jesus; this candle, when added to the Advent wreath, is typically white and larger than the other candles and is placed in the center of the wreath.

### Advent candle weeks, names & colors

Advent week 1 –Hope: Prophecy Candle (purple)

Advent week 2 –Peace: Bethlehem Candle (purple)

Advent week 3 –Joy: Shepherd's Candle (pink)

Advent week 4 –Love: Angel's Candle (purple)

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