

Signs & Symbols: The Advent Wreath



During Advent, churches will often have an Advent Wreath, a tradition which goes back to the ninth century. The Advent Wreath is made up of four candles, joined together in a single candelabra, candleholder or in a ring. On the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, one of the candles is lit with a prayer; additional ones are lit on each Sunday. Often there is a single candle in the middle that is then lit on Christmas Day itself. The progressive lighting of the candles symbolises the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of his second coming to judge the living and the dead.

The candles are in different colours to give a visual clue to their meaning for each particular Sunday. Each of the four Sundays reminds us of those who prepared for the coming of Christ. The first three are purple or blue to symbolise penitence; Advent being a time of getting ready, getting prepared, of cleaning up.

- Advent 1 is for 'The Patriarchs' such as Abraham and David and that day the prayers focus on Hope.
- Advent 2 is for 'The Prophets' such as Isaiah and all who foretold of the Messiah's coming. Prayers that day are focussed on Peace.
- Advent 3 is for John the Baptist and the prayers are for Joy.
- On the last Sunday, Advent 4, we concentrate on Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and so the candle's colour is rose and the prayers are of Love.

Some churches also have a central candle lit on Christmas Day, which is either white or gold to symbolise purity, perfection and kingship.

The whole Wreath is usually decorated with evergreens all of which have traditional meanings signifying victory over persecution and suffering, immortality, strength and healing.

The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life found in Christ. Any pinecones, nuts, or seedpods used to decorate the wreath also symbolize life and resurrection. All together, the wreath of evergreens depicts the immortality of our soul and the new, everlasting life promised to us through Christ.

by The Rev Dr Jo White

**Christ became what we are
that He might make us what he is.**

Athanasius