

Advent Family Devotions

What is Advent?

Advent is a word that comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means arrival. Advent is the season in which Christians prepare to celebrate Christmas—The arrival of Christ in the flesh. It is celebrated over the course of the five weeks leading up to Christmas.

In this season of Advent, we remember how the Hebrews waited for God's Promised One, Jesus. We, looking back, celebrate God's promise kept. Jesus was born in the unlikeliest of places, in the humblest of ways. God Incarnate came for God's people and for God's glory at Christmas. Jesus came on the human scene not as a Conquering King, but as a Baby.

Maybe a lesser known fact about Advent is that it has traditionally been a time for Christians to remember that we, like the Hebrews, are in a time of waiting for Christ's arrival, only now we wait for Him to come in Power and in Glory, at His promised Second Coming.

So, you will notice that the readings included in the guide follow these themes: God promised a Messiah. His Messiah came. Jesus came as a light, invading the darkness of sin and death. Jesus' abolition of darkness is working in our lives as He sanctifies us. Jesus' abolition of darkness will come to fruition when He comes again, and it is this for which we presently wait.

Why an Advent Wreath?

The origins of the advent wreath are found in the folk practices of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples who, during the cold December darkness of Eastern Europe, gathered wreaths of evergreen and lighted fires as signs of hope in a coming spring and renewed light.

Christians kept those popular traditions alive, and by the 16th century Catholics and Protestants throughout Germany used these symbols to celebrate their Advent hope in Christ, the Everlasting Light. From Germany, use of the Advent Wreath spread to other parts of the Christian World.

Traditionally, the wreath is made of four candles in a circle of evergreens. Three candles are violet and the fourth is rose, but four white candles or four violet candles can also be used. Each day at home, the candles are lighted, perhaps before the evening meal— one candle the first week, and then another each succeeding week until December 25th. A short prayer may accompany the lighting.

-Victor Hoagland, *About the Advent Wreath*

How to Make an Advent Wreath

To begin, put four candles on a wreath or at least in a circle. Traditionally the candles are purple, because in antiquity, purple dye was very expensive and it was the color of royalty. We use purple for Advent because it is the season of the coming of the King. In some traditions, blue is used to symbolize hope, and to distinguish the use of purple during Lent.

A fifth candle goes in the center of the wreath. It is the “Christ Candle,” and it should be white.

Using this Guide

The readings and prayers included in this guide are meant to help your family focus on the themes of Advent; the Joy of our Savior’s arrival in Bethlehem, and the expectation of His coming again. As you use the material in family devotion, it is our prayer that the joy and expectation, thankfulness and hope of this season be known to your family.

How to Use Your Advent Wreath

The idea is to use the wreath in conjunction with worship services or personal or family devotions on the four Sundays in Advent. You light candles at the beginning of each service and snuff them out at the end.

- On the first Sunday in Advent, you light the first candle. Have your service, then snuff out the candle.
 - On the second Sunday in Advent, you light two candles, first the one from the previous Sunday, then the second one. Have your service, then snuff out the candles.
- Continue on for all 5 Sundays in Advent. You should get a stair-step effect, since each candle is a different length by now.



First Sunday of Advent

Scripture Reading

Psalm: Psalm 25:1-10

Old Testament: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Gospel: Luke 21:25-36

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Litany

Reader: We light the first candle of Advent, the Prophecy Candle. We light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the world. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

All: Thanks be to God.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath - The Prophecy Candle

The Prayers

Our God and Father, we thank you for this Advent Season that helps us prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Messiah, your Son and our

Lord, at Christmas. Thank you for sending Jesus to save us from our sins. Amen.

Song

‘O Come, O Come, Emmanuel’

Second Sunday of Advent

Scripture Reading

Psalm: Luke 1:68-79

Old Testament: Malachi 3:1-4

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Epistle: Philippians 1:3-11

Litany

Reader: We light the second candle of Advent, the Bethlehem Candle. We light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the
Light of the world.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

All: Thanks be to God.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath – The Bethlehem Candle

The Prayers

Our God and Father, we thank you for this Advent Season that helps us prepare for the celebration of the coming of the
Messiah, your Son and our

Lord, at Christmas. Thank you for Jesus, your beloved Son, who was willing to be born and live and die in humility for our
salvation. Amen.

The Song

‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’

The Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture Reading

Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-6

Old Testament: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Gospel: Luke 3:7-18

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-7

Litany

Reader: We light the third candle of Advent, the Shepherds Candle. We light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the world. The

light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

All: Thanks be to God.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath – The Shepherds’ Candle

The Prayers

Our God and Father, we thank you for this Advent Season that helps us prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Messiah, your Son and our

Lord, at Christmas. Thank you for sending Jesus who opens our blind eyes and frees us from our sins. Amen.

Song

‘O Come All Ye Faithful’

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Scripture Reading

Psalm: Luke 1:47-55 or Psalm 80:1-7

Old Testament: Micah 5:2-5a

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45, 46-55

Epistle: Hebrews 10:5-10

Litany

Reader: We light the fourth candle of Advent, the Angels' Candle. We light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the world. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

All: Thanks be to God.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath - The Angels' Candle

The Prayers

Our God and Father, we thank you for this Advent Season that helps us prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Messiah, your Son and our

Lord, at Christmas. Thank you for sending Jesus, the Great Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep. Amen.

Song

'Hark the Herald Angels Sing'

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day

Scripture Reading

Psalm: Psalm 96

Old Testament: Isaiah 9:2-7

Gospel: Luke 2:1-14, 15-20

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14

Litany

Reader: We light the last candle of Advent, the Christ Candle. We light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the promised seed of the woman,
the Light of the World. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
All: Thanks be to God.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath – The Christ Candle

The Prayers

Our God and Father, we thank you for this Advent Season that helps us prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Messiah, your Son and our Lord, at Christmas. Thank you for sending Jesus to live for us, die for us and be raised for us. May we ever honor him unto your glory as we now await his return to make all things new. Amen.

Song

‘Joy to the World’