

ADVENT 2021

Introduction to Advent (from Adventus by the Western North Carolina Conference of the UMC)

ADVENTUS

Advent comes from the Latin word Adventus, which means “coming.” It marks the start of the church year, beginning with the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day and ending Christmas Eve. Advent is a season to prepare for the coming of Christ in various meanings: the promised coming of the Messiah to the Jews, the coming of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, the promised return of the risen Christ in final victory, and the continual coming of Christ into the lives and hearts of believers.

ADVENT WREATH

HISTORY

The Advent wreath has been traced back to the 16th century among German Lutherans, however Johan Hinrich Wichern is credited as the inventor. Wichern was a Protestant pastor in Germany in the 19th century. He built a large wooden ring with candles for each day of Advent. The wreath grew in popularity and shrunk in size to the 4-5 candles we are familiar with today.

SYMBOLISM

Advent wreaths are traditionally circular to represent God's infinite love. The wreath lays flat. Evergreen leaves/branches are often used to represent the hope of eternal life through Jesus. There are 4 candles, equally spaced around the wreath, representing the four weeks of Advent. The four candles symbolize hope, love, joy and peace. Sometimes, a fifth candle is added to the center of the wreath –the Christ candle –and it is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

BUILDING YOUR WREATH

- You have a green metal wreath with four candle holders. Insert each of the colored candles into the wreath. The pink candle will be the third you light, but since the wreath is a circle, you can place them in any order you like
- Add greenery. We have provided some live greenery for you to add around your wreath. If you prefer to use artificial greenery to create a wreath that you can use from year to year, that is great as well. If you have evergreen, holly, etc in your yard that you want to add to your wreath, that's wonderful! Remember, perfection is not the goal, we're going for something round with signs of life.
- Place the white Christ candle in the center of the wreath to light on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day and throughout the Christmas season.
- If you use live greenery, help it stay fresh throughout Advent by spritzing it with water.
- *Caution: Live greens are flammable, please don't leave candles lit unattended!*

INTRODUCTION TO OUR ADVENT WREATH PRACTICES

We are often inundated with knowledge and information. Even at church, most of our studies and other material consists of an expert feeding us information. These practices for an Advent wreath seek to create a space of quiet, a time away from being fed more knowledge and focusing instead on listening to God and sitting in God's presence. As you read the Scriptures and reflect, we encourage you to let go of the desire to find "the right answer" or to understand everything about a passage. Instead, we hope you will sit with the questions, recognize the things you wonder about, and listen for the ways God may move and speak even in the midst of not knowing. As you prepare for the coming of Christ, sit in the waiting, the uncertainty, and the trust to which we are called. Prepare your hearts for Christmas.

We encourage you to tailor these practices to the needs of your family and the amount of time you wish to spend. For the shortest candle lighting, simply light the candle and do the related prayer for each week. Other elements are listed below each week's prayer that you can add as you wish and time allows. You may prefer to use different elements each time to explore what feels right for you. Regardless of length, we suggest you find a set time to light the wreath. Right before or right after dinner often works well. Many people choose to do this each night of Advent. You may also choose to do it only once a week on Sunday evenings, or at some other time that works for you and your family.

For Individuals. Pray silently or aloud; if you choose to engage in the reflections, you may wish to journal your thoughts or to sit quietly for a time of reflection.

For Families or small groups. Have someone read the prayer aloud; if you choose to read the Scripture, read that aloud also; reflection questions can be discussed as a group and tailored based on the ages of members of your family. Where applicable, there are suggestions for how to substitute a story from a children's Bible for a selected Scripture. You may also choose to begin at the start of a children's Bible and read one story each night (or some nights, if we're being realistic 😊) of Advent until you reach the birth of Christ at Christmas.

Liturgies and prayers compiled from:

St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Picayune, MS (<http://www.scborromeo.org>)

The United Methodist Book of Worship

Almost Christmas Advent Devotion, by Rev. Heather S. Dorr

Adventus: Ancient Practices for an Advent at Home by WNCC of the UMC

Deck the Halls by GNJC of the UMC

WEEK 1: THE CANDLE OF HOPE

Sunday, Nov. 28th-Saturday, Dec. 4th

When lighting your wreath for the first time, begin by praying this prayer of blessing over your Advent wreath:

Heavenly Father, we look forward to the celebration of Christmas and to the coming of the Lord in glory. Bless this Advent wreath and all of us. As we pray daily around it, fill us with your life and strengthen us for our daily tasks. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Light 1 purple candle

Pray: Jesus, giver of hope, we begin this Advent season with hope in your promises. We long for your light to fill our world, we desire for your righteousness to offer relief to those who are suffering, we offer ourselves to be used by you so that your kingdom may come establishing justice and righteous forever. Amen.

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS FOR WREATH LIGHTING

Sing: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" vs. 1

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.

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

Additional readings for this week:

Psalms 96

Isaiah 2:1-5

Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Matthew 24:36-44

Luke 21:25-36

Responsive Reading:

Let's deck the halls with the hope of the coming King!

We once walked in darkness.

Now we see a great light!

Even in times of uncertainty

We can lift our hands in praise.

Let's deck the halls with hope!

Reflect:

What do you hope for?

Why do you continue to have hope?

As you consider the deep darkness in our world, what are the areas where God is asking you to help?

Where do you see hope in the Scripture?

What words or phrases stuck out to you from the Scripture?

What is God doing in this passage?

WEEK 2: THE CANDLE OF PEACE

Sunday, Dec. 5th- Saturday, December 11th

Light 2 purple candles

Pray: Jesus, giver of peace, we trust in you to be with us and guide us. In this season of preparation, help us to prepare not just our homes and our churches for your coming, but help us to get ready our minds, hearts and spirits. Help us to be people who provide comfort and peace to those who are in need of your good news. Amen.

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS FOR WREATH LIGHTING

Sing: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" vs. 2

O come, thou wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Read: Isaiah 26:7-13

Additional readings for this week:

Mark 1:1-8 (or a story about John the Baptist from a children's Bible)

2 Samuel 7:1-11

Luke 1:57-66

Micah 5:2-5a

Isaiah 12:2-6

Isaiah 7:10-16

Responsive Reading:

Let's deck the halls with the peace of the coming Savior!

There is comfort here for all.

In this season that can be stressful

We praise the Prince of Peace.

God has prepared a way for us.

Let's deck the halls with peace!

Reflect:

Where have you experienced peace in 2021?

What anger are you holding within you? How can you release it?

What kind of peace do you long for?

How does peace feel unachievable?

What are the things that "pretend" to offer us peace, yet fail to do so?

How can you be a sign of peace in this season and the coming year?

In what ways does the Scripture speak of peace?

What sticks out to you from the Scripture?

What is God calling you to do or pray in response?

WEEK 3: THE CANDLE OF JOY

Sunday, Dec. 12th- Saturday, Dec. 18th

Light 2 purple candles and the pink candle

Pray: Jesus, source of all joy, our souls glorify you, and our spirits rejoice in your goodness. We continue on this Advent journey desiring to bring true joy into this world. May we be bearers of joy for the people who have been cast aside, for the lonely, for the poor and hungry. We know this is possible because of your goodness, greatness, power and faithfulness. Amen.

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS FOR WREATH LIGHTING

Sing: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" vs. 4

O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree, an ensign of thy people be;
before thee rulers silent fall; all peoples on thy mercy call.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Read: Luke 1:39-55

Additional Readings for this week:

Luke 1:26-38 (from a children's Bible: the story of the angel appearing to Mary)

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Philippians 4:4-7

Isaiah 35:1-10

Isaiah 12:2-6

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Responsive Reading:

Let's deck the halls with the joy of the coming Messiah

We rejoice God our Savior.

God has done great things for us.

Joy has come in unexpected ways.

Our hearts are overflowing!

Let's deck the halls with joy!

Reflect:

What is bringing you joy in this season?

In what ways do you attempt to create joy during the weeks before Christmas? At other times?

How can you open yourself more fully to experiencing God's joy?

How can you share joy in this season?

What about the Scripture passage brings you joy?

What sticks out to you from this Scripture?

What does this Scripture call you to do or pray?

WEEK 4: THE CANDLE OF LOVE

Sunday, Dec. 19th- Christmas Eve

Light all 4 colored candles

Pray: Jesus, source of endless love, we are thankful that in all circumstances you are with us. As Christmas draws closer, we are ever grateful for the gift of your presence, God with us, today, tomorrow and always. We ask that as our various life circumstances unfold that you help us to choose you and choose love above all other things. Amen.

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS FOR WREATH LIGHTING

Sing: "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

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 forever, 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.

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

Additional readings for this week:

Isaiah 40:1-11

Luke 1:68-79

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 85

Luke 3:1-6

Responsive Reading:

Let's deck the halls with the love of Emmanuel!

When we are fearful,

God is with us.

When we are discouraged,

God is with us!

Let's deck the halls with love!

Reflect:

How are you being asked to fall in love with God again in this season?

How have you experienced love recently or in this year?

How can you share love in this season? In the year to come?

What does the Scripture say about love?

What words or phrases stick out from the Scripture?

What is God calling you to do or pray in response to the Scripture?

CHRISTMAS EVE OR DAY

Christmas Season: Christmas Eve through Epiphany on January 6th

Light all 4 colored candles and the white Christ candle in the center

Pray:

O almighty God, by the birth of your holy child Jesus
you gave us a great light to dawn on our darkness.

Grant that in his light we may see light.

Bestow upon us that most excellent Christmas gift of love to all people,
so that the likeness of your Son may be formed in us,
and that we may have the ever brightening hope of everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. *(UMBOW 277)*

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS FOR WREATH LIGHTING

Sing: "Joy to the World"

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Read: Luke 2:1-20 (or the Christmas story from a children's Bible or book)

Additional readings for this season:

John 1:1-14

Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalms 97

Isaiah 9:2-7

Matthew 2:1-12

Psalms 96

Isaiah 60:1-6

Reflect:

When have you experienced God breaking into the world this year?
What are the challenges this Christmas? How can you overcome them?
What aspects of Christmas can you carry into the new year?
What part of the Christmas story inspires the most wonder for you?
What is God calling you to do or pray in response?