

What Is An Advent Wreath?



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The Advent Wreath is a popular Advent tradition for families.

The origin of this custom dates back to pre-Christian Germany and Scandinavia with a pagan ritual celebrating the return of the sun after the winter solstice. (The Advent season on the Liturgical Calendar dates back to the late 4th Century.) There are numerous and varied explanations of the original symbolism associated with the physical makeup of the wreath, but the most likely is that it represented the cycle of the year and the life that survived through the harsh winter months... after the peak of the winter and as the daylight increased, candles were lit in thanks to the sun god.

Today, the pagan ritual has been replaced with a Christian one, representing the coming of Jesus the Christ. Most Advent Wreaths use three purple candles and one rose colored candle. Not surprising, the symbolic meanings of the Wreath, the foliage, the candles and their colors have as many, if not more, are even more varied than with the origin pagan ritual. Here's just one of the more common symbolic representations:

Four Candles. Four candles are used to mark the four weeks of Advent. At the start (on a Saturday) of each week of Advent, a new candle is lit, marking the time as we come closer to the birth of our Lord Jesus, the Light of the World.

Purple Candles. The color purple or violet is used to mark the Liturgical season of Advent (and Lent), signifying anticipation, purification and penance. .

Rose Candle. The Third Sunday of Advent is called "Gaudete Sunday". Its name comes from the Latin *Gaudete in Domino semper* which roughly translates "rejoice in the Lord always." These were the opening of the Antiphon the Latin Mass on the Third Sunday of Advent. As an option, the celebrant of the Mass could wear rose-colored vestments, an unusual color especially during Advent, to symbolize joy. In the Advent Wreath, the third candle is rose-colored for this reason.

(Optional) White Candle. Sometimes, a fifth candle is placed in the center of the wreath. If used, this candle is white. It is lit on Christmas Day, representing the Light of the World that is now here, and is re-lit every day of the 12 days of Christmas.

Circle. Symbolizes the eternal nature of God.

Evergreens. Represents Christ's salvific victory over spiritual death.