

Advent

Advent Resources – Building Traditions

The Advent Wreath

The adverts are coming thick and fast, each inviting us to tackle the Christmas shopping whether for presents or food for the feast. Even in these purely commercial and human terms, Advent is time of preparation. Indeed, as you may have heard before, the word 'Advent' itself derives from the Latin word 'Adventus' which means a 'coming'.

The season looks forward to the annual celebration of the nativity of Jesus. His birth should be seen in both historical terms and as a saving event. What we are celebrating at Christmas is the coming of God Incarnate (in flesh) who saves and redeems humanity. Advent also has another aspect as it encourages us reflect on and prepare for the promised Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time.

No matter what we do, we can't make Christmas come any sooner and so have to deal with our impatience, making best use of the waiting, sharing with Mary's patient expectation.

The days are shortening, and the evenings are darkening. It makes sense, therefore, to use light and an increasing amount of light to counter the darkness and to herald (look forward to welcoming) the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. Indeed, in some countries the feast of St Lucy (13 December), halfway through Advent, is marked by going all out on candles!

The creation of a wreath, four candles on green leaves, has become a symbol of Advent in many Christian homes. Progressively lighting four candles, Sunday after Sunday, is a recollection of the various stages of the wonderful story of salvation (*Directory of Popular Piety, 98*). In some counties, red candles are use, in others blue. Typically, Catholic churches in England and Wales use three purple (violet) candles and one in pink (rose) which reflect the liturgical colours of the season. As with Lent, the rose candle denotes an anticipatory light peeking through the dark, penitential season as we approach a great feast.

Various meanings have been attached to the advent wreath and its candles and specifically to the colours as we journey through the season:

	Typical Colour	Symbolism 1	Symbolism 2	Symbolism 3
Advent 1	Purple/violet	Hope	Prophecy	Isaiah
Advent 2	Purple/violet	Love	Bethlehem	John the Baptist
Advent 3	Rose/pink	Joy	Shepherds	Mary
Advent 4	Purple/violet	Peace	Angels	The Magi
Christmas	White	Christ, the source of our hope and joy, the Prince of Peace and the sign of God's love		



Building the wreath can be a great family activity, involving the harvesting of evergreen leaves and decorating with ribbon and other items. Care must clearly be taken to avoid any potentially toxic berries on evergreen plants and to keep a space between the leaves and the naked flame once the candles are lit in turn.

On the internet, there are literally hundreds of images of Advent wreaths (such as this beautiful one from our very own St George's Cathedral) and there is many a Pinterest board dedicated to the actual craft of building one. There are, however, some key components:

Rich in symbolism

Green leaves (from an evergreen, at this time of year) to symbolise life even when the countryside and plants appear to be dead or barren. Life comes with Jesus. Green is also the liturgical colour of hope.

These should be formed into a circle. The circle symbolises the eternal nature of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The life of God, a life perfectly expressed as love, is one in which we are invited to share. It also shows the circle of Jesus, Christ the King, who has come and will come again.



The colours of the candles, whether red (like the blood of Christ and the berries of the holly tree) or blue (in art the colour of heaven from where Christ will come, or indeed the liturgical colours of purple/violet and rose/pink, offer a chance to talk about the Emmanuel – God With Us.

Lighting the candles, Sunday after Sunday, is a reminder of the prophetic messages of the prophets leading to Christ's coming.



When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming.

(CCC 524)

You are free to work with what suits your family, however, here we offer a short series of suggestions which you can adapt as you see fit. Typically, this would take place as part of the family meal.

- It consists of a short prayer (the opening prayer/collect from Mass) then, as the candle is lit, the Gospel or other reading for that Sunday is read (we've provided the Gospel text for Year B – taken from the English Standard Version – and the references for the other readings for you to find in your Bible, if you wish).
- To further make the connection of waiting, along with the lighting of the candles, you might also open a window on an Advent calendar or add of a symbol to a Jesse tree or a figure to the crib, if you have one.
- We also feature a short reflection and question, based on the opening prayer.
- You may also want to burn some incense to increase the sense of the sacred and perhaps even sing a simple song or chant (or hum the tune) such as O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

The Book of Blessings (chapter 47) talks of the blessing of the wreath in the home by a parent or other member of the family and offers a short rite for this purpose. We provide an adapted version of this short form here.

More excellent information on how to celebrate the season of Advent can be found on the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference website:

<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Seasons/Advent.pdf>

Adapted shorter rite for the initial blessing of the wreath in the home

As we make the Sign of the Cross, a parent or other family member, as leader, says:

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All reply:

Who made heaven and earth.

The leader or another then introduces and reads from Scripture (Isaiah 9:1-2, 5-7) saying:

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shined.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and for evermore.

The leader then says the prayer of blessing with their hands joined:

**Lord God,
the Church and this house joyfully awaits the coming of Jesus our Saviour,
who enlightens our hearts
and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin.
Pour out your blessings on us
as we light the candles of this wreath;
may their light reflect the wonder of Jesus, our light,
who is Lord, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

To conclude this part, we make the Sign of the Cross as the leader says:

May the light of Christ lead us to the joy of his kingdom, now and forever.

All respond together:

Amen.

Week one – First Sunday of Advent

Prayer from the Collect for the First Sunday of Advent

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ
with righteous deeds at his coming,
so that, gathered at his right hand,
they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Reading from the First Sunday of Advent (Year B)

Old Testament and Epistle References: Isaiah 63:16–9,64:2–7; and 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Gospel: Mark 13:33–37

Brothers and Sisters, listen to the Gospel according to St Mark:

Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.

A thought and a question for reflection

The opening prayer speaks of how we hope to be gathered at Christ's right hand. This is the very same Christ who comes to us not only in the liturgy but also in the least of our brothers and sisters. How we respond to the needs of others – the righteous needs that accompany us to his coming – is our Advent gift to God.

How might we help those in particular need at this time, from the gifts that God has given us?

Lighting of the first candle perhaps accompanied by song

Week two – Second Sunday of Advent

Prayer from the Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Reading from the Second Sunday of Advent (Year B)

Old Testament and Epistle References: Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14;

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

Brothers and Sisters, listen to the Gospel according to St Mark:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,
'Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,
the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,"'

John appeared, baptising in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt round his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

A thought and a question for reflection

We learn of God's wisdom when we hear the voice of Christ in the Scriptures. This heavenly wisdom helps us undertake our daily tasks in a way that does not take our focus away from Jesus.

How might we make better use of the riches we find in the Bible to help us live our lives, rooted in and focussed on Jesus?

Lighting of the first and second candles perhaps accompanied by song

Week three – Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)

Prayer from the Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray,
to attain the joys of so great a salvation,
and to celebrate them always
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Reading from the Third Sunday of Advent (Year B)

Old Testament and Epistle References: Isaiah 61:1-2,10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24;

Gospel: John 1:6-8,19-28

Brothers and Sisters, listen to the Gospel according to St John:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord", as the prophet Isaiah said.'

(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, 'Then why are you baptising, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptise with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.' These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptising.

A thought and a question for reflection

In the opening prayer we hear that God is looking at us, seeing how we wait for and look forward to the approaching feast of the Lord's Nativity.

How is our waiting marked by prayer and joy?

Lighting of the first, second and third(rose) candles perhaps accompanied by song

Week four – Fourth Sunday of Advent

Prayer from the Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,
your grace into our hearts,
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son
was made known by the message of an Angel,
may by his Passion and Cross
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Reading from the Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year B)

Old Testament and Epistle References: Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12,14,16; Romans 16:25-27;

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Brothers and Sisters, listen to the Gospel according to St Luke:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!' But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'

And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her.

A thought and a question for reflection

You may be familiar with this prayer from the Angelus which recounts the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary in the Annunciation and also helps us recall the Angels that appeared to the shepherds who came to do homage to Jesus. It talks about Jesus' birth but also his suffering and his victory over sin and death – that is, the whole mystery of Christ.

As we rejoice in Jesus' birth how do we bear the crosses we are asked to carry and how do we help others in bearing their burdens?

Lighting of all four of the coloured candles perhaps accompanied by song



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