

The Advent Wreath

Advent is the time before Christmas, beginning early in December and ending on Christmas Eve. It is a time of preparation for Christmas.

Many Christians believe it is also a time for prayer, an ideal time to reflect on past choices and think about making improved ones in the future.

What Makes an Advent Wreath?

The Advent wreath is made from evergreen branches which are twined to form a circle. Evergreen leaves, like holly and pine, are easily available during Advent.

In many Christian churches, there are three purple candles and one pink candle around the edge, with a white candle in the middle. Each candle represents something and one is lit each Sunday during Advent.

The Meaning of the Candles

Week 1 – a purple candle is lit. This is known as the Candle of Hope and represents the prophets in the Bible who predicted the birth of Jesus.



Week 2 – a purple candle is lit. This is known as the Candle of Preparation or the Bethlehem Candle, remembering when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.



Week 3 – a pink candle is lit. This is known as the Candle of Joy or the Shepherd's Candle. It represents the joy of the shepherds when they were told the news of the Saviour's birth.



Week 4 – a purple candle is lit. This is known as the Candle of Love or the Angel's Candle and represents the angels telling the shepherds the news of Jesus' birth and his love for the world.



Christmas Eve – the white candle is lit. This is known as the Christ Candle. This reminds Christians that Jesus was pure.



The History of Advent Wreaths

Wreaths have been used in winter solstice celebrations for hundreds of years. People would get together to celebrate the winter solstice and welcome the longer days of sunlight.

A wheel would be laid down and covered with evergreen branches and candles. This represented a circle of light in the dark days. Prayers would be said to the god of light to turn the wheel of the earth back towards the sun to make the days longer. Pagans called this time of celebration Yule. Later, wreaths were used as religious symbols during Advent.

Did You Know?

The first Advent wreath was created in 1839 by Johann Wichern, who lived in Germany. He was the founder of a children's home. The children kept asking when it would be Christmas, so he lit a white candle each Sunday and a smaller red candle for each day in-between, to show them how many days left until Christmas.

Symbolism of Advent Wreaths

The Advent Wreath has different meanings for different people.

Some believe the wreath is circular because it represents the beginning of another year. Others believe that the circle represents God's unending love.

The candles represent light in the darkness of life with the flames offering light during the dark winter months. Christians believe that lighting the candles represents Jesus coming into the world of darkness and bringing love to everyone in moments of sadness. Christians use the white candle in the centre to represent Jesus being born and being the Light of the World.

Questions

1. Which word is closest in meaning to **reflect**? Tick one.

to look at oneself in the mirror

to give serious thought to one's own behaviour

to make other choices

2. When does Advent end?

3. Give an example of an evergreen plant mentioned in the text.

4. Explain in your own words what you understand by the term **prophet**.

5. Identify two facts that we are told about the pink candle.

6. What is the significance of the colour of the Christ Candle?

7. Match up the sentences.

The Candle of Preparation
The Shepherd's Candle
The Candle of Love

is also known as the Angel's Candle.
is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent.
is also known as the Bethlehem Candle.

The Advent Wreath

8. Summarise the key details of the section called **The History of Advent Wreaths**.

9. Tick true or false for the following statements.

	True	False
The first Advent wreath used purple and white candles.		
The person who created the first Advent wreath was German.		
Wichern made the first Advent wreath in 1939.		
Johann Wichern made the first Advent wreath for children.		

10. In your own words, explain the symbolic meaning of the candles.
