

The Advent Wreath

Tony Cosentino, Renfrew County CDSB

Virtue Link: Faith, Hope, Love, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude

Catholic Character Themes: Community, Compassion, Discipleship, Reverence, Solidarity, Stewardship

The Advent wreath is rich in Christian symbolism. It is made of evergreen boughs formed in a circle. The Advent wreath holds four candles: three purple and one pink; some wreaths also have a white candle in the centre.



An Ancient Tradition

The Advent wreath has its roots in traditions practiced by the early Germanic peoples. As winter's short and dark days began growing brighter, they would celebrate the coming light by making wreaths of green and lighting fires. When these people became Christian, they began using wreaths in their churches, to celebrate the coming birth of Jesus, Light of the World.

The Circle: No Beginning or End

The wreath is formed in a circle, which has no beginning or end. This reminds us of our God, who is eternal -without beginning or end. The shape of the Advent wreath also represents the gift of eternal life won for us by Jesus' dying and rising to new life.



Green: The Colour of Life and Hope

The wreath is made of evergreen boughs. Green is the colour of *life*. It reminds us of the newborn life of Jesus our Saviour. It also reminds us of the gift of new and eternal life we received at baptism. The colour green is also the colour of *hope*. Christian hope tells us that we can build a better world by living the Good News of Jesus' Gospel. Christian hope also tells us that nothing can overcome God's love for us in Christ.

Candles: Light of the World, Faith

The candles represent *light*: Jesus, the Light of the world, who shines in our darkness, and shows us the way to the Father. The candle also symbolizes God's gift of *faith*.



By faith, we say "I trust you" to God; by faith, we know we are God's beloved children; by faith, we walk with Jesus as members of his body, the Church.

Purple: Royalty and Penance

There are three purple candles: one for the first, the second and fourth weeks of Advent. Purple is the symbol of *royalty* and *penance*. Purple reminds us of Jesus' coming as Prince of Peace, and King. Our Advent prayer, acts of kindness and self-



denial help make our hearts ready to welcome Jesus our Lord, as he comes to us on Christmas Day.

Pink: Joy

Pink is the colour of *joy*. The pink candle is used in third Sunday of Advent, called *Joyful Sunday* (*Gaudete Sunday* in Latin). On this day, people traditionally relax their penances and joyfully sing the Gloria at mass as a foretaste of the coming joy of the Christmas season.

White: Jesus

The white candle at the centre of the Advent wreath is lit on Christmas day. The white candle represents Jesus, the pure and spotless Lamb of God, born of Mary to lead us to the house of the Father. He is the fullness of our Christmas joy!

