

Preparing and Praying With an Advent Wreath

Advent begins on the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, November 30, and continues through three more Sundays and any weekdays until Christmas Eve. The word advent, from Latin, means “coming.” It is a time of waiting, listening, and longing for not only Christmas, when we remember Christ’s coming as an infant, but also for His second coming at the end of time. The Advent season is rich in tradition. A favorite home tradition is gathering around the Advent wreath to pray in the light of its candles.

A circle of evergreen and four candles are essential to an Advent wreath. The evergreen circle symbolizes eternal life and candles for the four weeks of Advent increasingly light up the darkness. Traditionally the candles are purple because expensive purple dye was reserved in ancient days for royalty—and we await our King—and its deep hue denotes vigilant yet joyfully expectant waiting. Rose may be used during the third week to signal that Christmas is near.

There are a variety of ways to make your own wreath using the basics of a base, candle-holders, greens, and candles. Variations are given below for each of the essentials, followed by suggestions for your home Advent prayer.

Easy Advent wreath

The simplest way to make a wreath is to arrange greens on a round tray or in a ring mold that holds water. Nestle four candlesticks, pillar candles, or votive candle-holders in the greens (secure with florist clay if necessary) or set them just inside the ring. Add water if possible. Insert four blue-violet candles or one rose and three purple candles, or four white or ivory candles with colored ribbons.



Constructing your wreath

1. Start by choosing a **wreath base** such as one of the following
 - Styrofoam or straw wreath form: Purchase an 8"–12" Styrofoam disk or straw form from a craft store. Note that these forms do not provide moisture for live evergreen, requiring the use of artificial greens or an occasional change of fresh greens.
 - Floral foam such as Oasis: Buy a green 8"–12" foam ring or a block and carve it into a circular wreath. Place the wreath form on a large plate or waterproof tray.
 - Sphagnum moss wreath form: Soak the form overnight to ensure that it is thoroughly moist and allow excess water to drip off. Wrap the pre-soaked form with green florist wreath wrap.
 - Vine wreath form: Purchase a vine wreath or make one using wisteria, grapevine, bittersweet, cane, or willow. Soak the vine ahead of time so that it is pliable enough to curl into a wreath.
 - Wire wreath form: Purchase a form at a craft store or make your own out of strong wire or coat hangers.
 - Ready-made Advent wreath form, consisting of a metal or ceramic ring and candle-holders.
 - Ready-made wreath: Purchase a ready-made Christmas wreath, either artificial or live.
2. Attach **candle-holders**
 - Florist candle-holders: Purchase plastic green holders from a craft, garden, or florist shop. Insert the holders into a foam or moss form, or fasten securely to other types of wreaths with florist wire or hot glue.
 - Spikes: Spacing evenly, push four long, slender nails from the underside of a foam or moss wreath so that the pointed side comes through the top high enough to impale a thick candle.
 - Heavy florist wire: Twist around the bottom 2" of each candle and tightly fasten the ends to the form so that the candle does not wobble.
 - Candlesticks: Select four of your own candlesticks—they don't need to match—or buy four inexpensive dinner or votive candle-holders from a dollar store. Nestle them in the greens or just inside the circle.
 - You may not need candle-holders if you can carve holes in a foam mold or you use pillar candles.
3. Add **greens**
 - Live evergreen: Cut yew, pine, cedar, juniper, fir, spruce, hemlock, balsam, laurel, holly, boxwood, ivy, and/or magnolia from your yard, or request scrap where Christmas trees are sold. Clip short stems to insert directly into a foam or moss base or attach with florist pics, which are tiny stakes with wire to bundle stems. If you have a vine, straw, or metal frame, attach short bundles of greens with florist wire.
 - Artificial greens: Buy permanent greens from a craft store and attach as you would live greens.
 - Garland: Purchase live or artificial garland, cut a little longer than your wreath frame circumference, attach with florist wire, and arrange to cover the form.
4. Insert **four candles**
 - Tapers (8"–12"): Purchase 3 purple and 1 rose or 4 blue-violet dinner tapers; if you cannot find proper colors, buy white or ivory candles and tie purple and rose or blue-violet ribbons around them.
 - Pillar or votive candles: Set the four candles just inside the wreath form or nestle in the greens, being careful that

candle flame will not come near the greens.

When your wreath is finished, set it where the household can gather for the daily candle lighting. Usually the candles are lit in the evening, so try placing it on or near the dinner table as a focal point during the evening meal. Or set it on a table, hearth, or mantle in the living or family room where you can gather after dinner or shortly before bedtime. A tray under the wreath makes it easy to move. On the evening before the First Sunday of Advent, bless your wreath and light the first candle. Use the first week prayers during the week. Light an additional candle each succeeding week. The growing light is more significant than candle order, so you can rotate among the candles and let them burn down evenly.

Family members may take turns as prayer leader, candle lighter, and Scripture reader. Feel free to compose your own prayers and add Scripture passages, especially the Sunday or daily Gospel. Incorporate sharing about how each person lived the Gospel or prayer today. You could sing a verse of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” or another Advent hymn after Scripture or to begin or end prayer.

On Christmas Eve, if you wish, change the candles to white, gold, or red. Add holly or Christmas ornaments, and continue using your wreath throughout the Christmas season, which ends the second Sunday after January 1.

Blessing the Advent Wreath

All make the sign of the cross.

Leader: Now that days are short and nights are cold, Advent reminds us that waiting can be a sacred time. As we light the candles of this wreath, we anticipate Christmas lights and warmth and celebration of God’s coming as an infant. This wreath also reminds us to prepare for Christ’s second coming at the end of time when he will appear not in swaddling clothes but radiant in light and he will wrap us in his glory.

Scripture: Isaiah 40: 3–5. Reader concludes: “The Word of the Lord.” All respond: “Thanks be to God.”

After a short silence one person sprinkles the wreath with holy water as the leader prays: Lord our God, bless this wreath, symbol of eternal life for which we yearn. May its light be a sign of our salvation. Bless our waiting and fill us with joyful hope. Come, Lord Jesus.

All: Come quickly!

First Week of Advent

Light one candle as all make the sign of the cross.

Leader: Lord Jesus, we long for you more than for holiday treats and gifts. Thank you for parents, teachers, pastors, and others who light our way toward you. Help us to stay on the right path, do good, and avoid doing wrong. Come, Lord Jesus!

All: Come quickly!

Second Week of Advent

Light two candles as all make the sign of the cross.

Leader: God of power and mercy, open our hearts to receive Christ. Help us to see Christ in one another and be patient, kind, and generous. Let us be a light to those who are sad, cold, or hungry. Come, Lord Jesus!

All: Come quickly!

Third Week of Advent

Light three candles, including the rose one if you use it, as all make the sign of the cross.

Leader: Loving God, we look forward to celebrating the birthday of your Son, the Prince of Peace. Let peace reign in our household and show us how to bring peace to those who feel stressful, anxious, or hurt. Fill our hearts and minds with your Spirit. Come, Lord Jesus!

All: Come quickly!

Fourth Week of Advent

Light all four candles as all make the sign of the cross.

Leader: Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you are close to your Church and this little church, our family. Keep us faithful to you as we wait in joyful hope for the day when we will see you face to face. Come, Lord Jesus.

All: Come quickly!

Christmas Eve through the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord: Take turns sharing prayers of gratitude, sing a Christmas carol, and conclude with the acclamation, “Christ is born for us!” to which all respond, “Come let us adore.”