

St. John's Church School

Advent

ART Preparing for Advent—

Family Art Day - Making a Family Advent Wreath

History of Advent

The word “advent” comes from the Latin words for “to” (ad) and “come” (vent). We, as Christians, celebrate the season before Christmas that we call “Advent” as a time of preparation and reflection on Jesus’ coming to bring us the gift of salvation: through his coming as a tiny child to earth, all the way through the cross and resurrection and ascension, to the time when he will appear on earth again in his promised Second Coming.

Throughout history, the season of Advent has evolved to become the four weeks before Christmas that we observe today. In the year A.D. 529, The Emperor Justinian declared December 25 a holiday, both civic and religious. Shortly afterwards, the Council of Tours in A.D. 567 established the period of Advent as a time of fasting and solemn preparation before Christmas Day. Those who wished to join the Christian church were urged to prepare themselves mentally and physically for Christ’s coming.

Today, Advent is still observed as the beginning of the Christian Church year. The dates change as the calendar does, from year to year, the first Sunday in Advent falling on the Sunday nearest November 30. Depending on which day Christmas Eve falls on, the season can last from 23 to 28 days.

The use of color has always been important in the observation of the church seasons. We use purple during Advent, signifying our preparation for Christ’s birth on Christmas Day.

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath, originated, most likely, in either France or Germany within the traditions of the Lutheran Church. Today, the wreath or its many variations can be found in many cultures and many forms, because of the way it counts and represents the weeks before Christmas.

The circle of the wreath represents the unending love of God. The evergreens represent the hope of eternal life shared by God’s people. The four candles represent both the four Sundays in Advent as well as the thousands of years people waited for the Messiah. The lighting of another

St. John's Church School Advent

candle each week represents the people's growing joy and anticipation of the light that came into the world with Jesus' birth.

The lighting of the wreath on the Sundays before Christmas has no official tradition. Some churches use all purple candles; whereas, others, such as St. John's include a rose or mauve candle for the third Sunday. Then, on Christmas Eve night, a large white candle is lit in the middle of the wreath to represent the coming of Christ.

Making and Using the Home Advent Wreath

A preformed ring, grapevine, or straw wreath can be used as the base for your Advent wreath. Wrap colorful ribbons or cording around the base, then space four candles evenly around the ring. At St. John's, we use 3 purple and 1 mauve or rose candle. A white pillar candle may be placed in the center of the wreath to be lit on Christmas Day and during the twelve days of Christmas to Epiphany.

Arrange evergreens on the wreath, covering the base. The evergreens symbolize the eternal life we have as Christians. The advantage of a preformed Advent wreath is that it has already been fitted with bases for the candles. Fresh evergreens from your garden are appropriate. However, artificial ones may be used, along with berries. Never leave burning candles unattended.

One familiar theme for the candles includes: The first candle as the prophecy candle; the second as the Bethlehem candle; the third as the shepherd's candle and the fourth as the angel's candle.

Suggestions for lighting the home Advent wreath:

First Sunday in Advent Gather the family around the wreath. Perhaps family members could take turns lighting the candles each Sunday, and reading the collect for the First Sunday in Advent. If your family wishes, you may want to sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" or another Advent hymn as you light the wreath. Light one purple candle. Read the First Sunday in Advent collect found on page 90 in the Book of Common Prayer (1928). You may also want to read the scriptures as well.

Second Sunday in Advent Light the candle from the first Sunday and the next purple candle. The collect for Second Sunday in Advent is found in the prayer book on page 92.

St. John's Church School Advent

The Third Sunday in Advent Light the first and second purple candles and the rose candle. The collect for the Third Sunday in Advent is on page 93 of the prayer book.

Fourth Sunday Light the previous three candles and the last purple one. The collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent is on page 95 of the prayer book.

Christmas Day Light all four candles in their order, followed by the white Christmas candle in the center. The collect and scriptures for Christmas Day are in the prayer book on page 96. A favorite Christmas carol would be appropriate today.