

THE ADVENT WREATH:

The Advent Wreath can be used to help children of all ages understand the movement through the four weeks of the season of Advent.

Light has always been a symbol of hope in the darkness. We know that the people of the Stone Age built Newgrange in such a way that the light of the rising sun enters the chamber at the darkest time of the year. This was a sign for them that the light was beginning to overcome the darkness. Long before Jesus was born the people of Eastern Europe made wreaths of evergreen branches and added lighted candles as a sign of hope in the dark days of winter. In northern European countries lights were placed on wheels and prayers were offered to the god of light to turn the wheel of the earth back towards the sun.



By the 1500s Christians had adapted this tradition and were using Advent wreaths as part of their preparation for Christmas. They were remembering what Jesus said, *'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'* (Jn 8:12) By the 17th century the Advent wreath was used throughout Germany to mark the time spent waiting for the birth of the Christ child at Christmas. This tradition spread from Germany to the rest of the world.

THE ADVENT WREATH EXPLAINED

A CIRCLE OF EVERGREEN

The wreath is circular in shape to show the everlasting love of God, a love that has no beginning or end. Evergreen leaves such as holly, laurel, ivy, spruce or pine are used also help us to remember that God loves us always. The kind of leaves used can also have a meaning that can be related to our faith. Laurel leaves are signs of victory over persecution and suffering. The prickly leaves of the holly can remind us of the crown of thorns worn by Jesus.

4 CANDLES

THREE PURPLE AND ONE PINK

There is a candle to be lit at the beginning of each of the four weeks of Advent. There is also a tradition that says that each week of Advent represents a thousand years, so that the four weeks add up to the four thousand years from Adam and Eve until the birth of Jesus, the saviour of the world.

There are three purple candles. These remind us that Advent is a time when we are asked to pray and to think about those areas of our lives where we need forgiveness. Purple is the colour of repentance in the Church. During Advent people are invited to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation during parish Penitential Services.

The pink candle is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent which is also called *Gaudete Sunday*. This means Joyful Sunday or the Sunday of Rejoicing. We rejoice because we are more than half way through our preparation for Christmas and the birth of Jesus draws ever closer. On the Third Sunday of Advent the Entrance Antiphon at Mass echoes the theme of rejoicing when it proclaims; *'Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice. The Lord is always near.'* (Phil 4:4-5)