

No Christmas without Advent

Advent is not really understood today. Some Christians don't even know why we have Advent wreaths. So often in our consumer society, Advent is totally forgotten. We should remember that there is no true Christmas without Advent.

In fact, the word Advent means *coming* or *arrival*. We anticipate the coming of the Christ child, and this is what prepares us for Christmas—the longing for the savior.

Advent also symbolizes our journey towards becoming Christians, welcoming Christ not only into the world, but also into our hearts. The Church celebrates this preparation time with Advent wreaths and candles near the altar.



The wreath and candles represent the coming light of the world casting out darkness. Drawing near a home wreath with family and friends allows us to meditate on the mystery of this coming light. Around the wreath, everyone can sing and/or pray which opens our hearts to the deeper meaning of Christmas. This allows us to remember how we were delivered from sin and darkness.

The tradition of the wreaths comes from the old European tradition of lighting candles, and placing them around bundles of evergreen. During the darkest months of the year, these decorations looked to the light of spring. Jesus, in many ways, can be seen as our spring, who gives light to our lives.

Later on, Christians adopted this practice. As early as the 16th-century, Advent wreaths were made essentially as we see them today with four candles—3 purple and 1 rose. The 3 purple candles represent hope, peace and love (or prayer, penance and preparatory sacrifices). The 1 rose candle represents the joy of the arrival of Christ, which ends our Advent experience, and we celebrate the beauty of Christmas.