

# The story behind the pink Advent candle

As the commercial world is already saturated with red and green, it's easy to lose sight of the true colors of the season—the Advent season. This week the color pink represents joy. It turns out, the Church has a good reason for putting one pink candle in the Advent wreath.

To discover the story of the pink candle, we first have to look at the origins of the season and the wreath. Until Advent was instituted toward the end of the [fifth century](#), the only season Christians observed was Lent. As preparation for Christmas, the Church established Advent in the spirit of Lent—as a season of reflection and penance.

## A wreath of hope

The custom of the Advent wreath originated with pre-Christian Germanic peoples whose evergreen wreaths and fires signified hope in the darkness of December. Christians maintained the tradition and by the 16th century German Catholics and Protestants used the wreath to symbolize hope for Christ's coming. The practice spread through the Christian world.

By one [interpretation](#), the wreath's four candles represent the first Advent before Christ's birth, with each week commemorating 1,000 years from Adam and Eve until the Nativity. Purple candles stand for prayer, penance, and sacrifices and good works done during the Advent season, as we also wait for the Lord's second coming.

Another view is that the candles in the wreath have specific names which we can reflect on as we light them and pray: the first is hope, the second peace, the third joy and the fourth love.

## The color for joy

A pink candle that signifies joy makes sense since it is lit on Gaudete Sunday—named for the entrance antiphon for that Sunday's Mass: "Rejoice (gaudete) in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice." The joy is subdued, however, as the penitential violet of the other weeks lessens to rose as we move closer to Christmas.

As Advent is patterned in part after Lent, Gaudete Sunday is similar to the Lenten Laetare Sunday, which also represents joy and falls at the midpoint of Lent.

And that finally leads to the explanation for the pink candle. In the ancient Church on Laetare Sunday in Lent, the Pope gave a citizen a [pink rose](#). The tradition has continued, as popes bestowed golden roses on Catholic rulers and now more commonly, on places of devotion.

Following the papal rose custom, bishops and priests began wearing rose-colored vestments on Laetare Sunday. The Church then brought the Lenten practice of rose vestments to Advent on Gaudete Sunday. As a result, the pink candle gained a place in the Advent wreath.

Although the culture tells us it's already Christmas, the Church reminds us through the pink candle of Advent that there is an appointed time for everything (Eccl. 3:1). The time now is for rejoicing—because the Lord is coming soon!

