

## An Anglican Moment: The Advent Wreath

The Advent Wreath is an evergreen wreath with four candles (three purple, one rose) around the edges and one large white Candle in the center. This symbol of the season has been growing in popularity in this country for many years. Originally a German tradition, it is now difficult to find any church or home which is not decorated with an Advent wreath. But what does it mean?

The wreath itself is in the form of a never-ending circle made of evergreen limbs which never fade or die. Together, these elements symbolize the promise of Advent. When Christ comes again, he will give eternal life to all those who are found faithful to him.

On the First Sunday in Advent one purple Candle is lighted. Purple indicates that this season is a penitential time of prayer and fasting in preparation for meeting Christ our judge. We are called to fast and pray for these four weeks. But this is a candle, giving us the light of the hope that in Christ, we will be ready to meet our maker. Our prayers and fasting will be effective. We will succeed.

On the Second Sunday in advent we light a second purple candle, indicating that our time of watching and waiting continues. As the fasting grows more intense, the light shines brighter from two candles.

On the third week, we light a rose colored candle. Rose is simply a lighter shade of purple, and indicates that our burdens, though real, are light because our prayers will be answered in time – when Christ returns. So even in the middle of a penitential season, we can still rejoice at the promises of God.

The fourth purple candle reminds us that we are still wondering in the wilderness of this world. We have not yet arrived at our eternal home. We must continue to watch and pray.

Finally, on Christmas Eve, the four outside candles have burned. The first candle is almost a nub, bare seen above the greenery. The time is drawing near when our fasting will end. When evening comes, and Christ is born, the White Candle is lighted in the middle of the wreath. Now the penitential purple is barely visible as the bright light of the wreath illuminates the central Candle. Christ will come and put an end to all darkness and sin. There will be no more weeping for sin, no more fasting in supplication. Then there will be only joy.