

# What is Advent?

- ◆ Advent is the beginning of the Christian church year.
- ◆ Advent is a “season” in the church calendar that begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day and ends on Christmas Eve.
- ◆ The color for Advent is purple, the color of penitence and fasting, the ways that early Christians used this season to prepare for the birth of the Savior. It is also the color of royalty to welcome the Advent of a king, or the Prince of Peace (Jesus).
- ◆ The word “Advent” is from the Latin for “coming” or “arrival.”
- ◆ Red and green are the more secular colors of Christmas. They are derived from older European practices of using evergreens and holly to symbolize the ongoing life and hope that Christ’s birth brings to a cold world. They are not used in the church because red and green are used with other church seasons.
- ◆ There is no historical evidence that Advent existed as a season in the Christian Church year before the 4th century, and in those early times it was only a time for fasting. It is believed that it was instituted in the same way Lent is used before Easter - a time of spiritual preparation before a great celebration and feast. Today, in the western Christian Church, the penitential aspect has been replaced by an emphasis on hope, expectation, and anticipation.
- ◆ In the same way that the true meaning of Easter is lost without understanding and knowing the story of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, the true meaning of Christmas is lost without a time to hear the prophecies and hear the stories of Mary and Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25) and Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:5-80).

## Evergreens in Advent

Evergreens were symbols of the hope for spring for ancient Germanic peoples, a tradition that was adopted by Christians by the 16th century. During Advent, evergreens symbolize new and everlasting life brought through Jesus the Christ. Decorating with evergreens is a form of preparation for coming of Jesus. The use of the Advent Wreath allows us to prepare both at church and at home -- Jesus, the light of the world.



## Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath originated in Germany, but quickly passed to the Scandinavian countries and is now often a part of Advent among families in the U.S. and Canada. The wreath is a circle with four, or sometimes five, candles on it. The circle is often decorated with evergreen branches, and represents eternity. The candles represent Jesus, the one who said, “I am the light of the world.” There are four candles representing the four centuries of waiting for Christ after the last of the prophets. These four candles are usually purple, representing royalty, the coming of the King. Often, the third candle is pink, symbolizing Mary, the mother of Jesus. A candle is lit on each Sunday of Advent, along with the candles from the previous Sundays. Sometimes a white candle is added to the center of the wreath, symbolizing the Christ Child. This candle is lit on Christmas Day.



## Advent Calendar

In the 19th century, German Protestant families made a chalk line for every day in December until Christmas Eve. Soon commercial entrepreneurs decided to capitalize on this idea. The first known advent calendar was published for Advent in 1851.

