

Celebrate Advent Hope, Peace, Joy and Love

Introduction

The season of Advent begins the Christian liturgical church year. During the weeks of Advent we participate in a time of waiting for the birth of the Messiah and we hear from Scripture words from the prophets pointing us to Christ's birth. It is also a time for Christians to look with hope for the second coming of Christ.

Advent is also a time of intentional prayer for the light of Christ to fill the darkest corners of our world. We quietly listen to the voice of God in Scripture and blend our voices with those of God's people in song. We pray together for the light of Christ's love to fill our hearts with hope, peace, joy and love.

These Advent worship times provide the opportunity for quiet reflection, the words of the Psalmist and Old Testament prophets; a hymn for the lighting of the Advent wreath; other hymns and the visual symbolism centered around the Advent wreath.

Advent Wreath Background

As Christians, we use symbols to express visually the basic tenets of our faith and as reminders of the pilgrimage of our life in Christ. Symbols can have heightened meaning for us when associated with particular seasons of that journey. One such symbol is the Advent wreath. The word "advent" is from the Latin word for "coming," and as such, describes the "coming" of our Lord Jesus Christ into the flesh.

The Advent wreath has its roots in the pre-Christian practices of northern Europe. People sought the return of the sun in the dark time of the year (at the winter solstice) by lighting candles and fires. As early as the Middle Ages, Christians used fire and light to represent Christ's coming into the world.

Using this same symbolism, the Advent wreath was developed a few centuries ago in Germany as a sign of the waiting and hopeful expectation of the return in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wreath, a circle, came to represent the eternal victory over death through Jesus Christ. The evergreens were a sign of the faithfulness of God to God's people, even in death, and the lighted candles were a reminder of the light of Christ brought into the world. This symbolism can be just as strong for us today.

There is no one prescribed color for the candles, although several traditions are current. Four natural colored candles are always appropriate and symbolize the Light for which we wait. Deep purple candles, a sign of the penitential nature sometimes attributed to the season, may be appropriate. Another practice uses a pink candle for the third week of Advent. It reminds us that the end of Advent is almost here, and we can hardly contain our joy. Others who use blue as the liturgical color during Advent would be consistent to use blue candles.