

Advent is the countdown period before Christmas when many Christians think about what the Nativity story means in their lives.



## The History and Origins of Advent Wreaths

For hundreds of years, wreaths and candles have been used to celebrate a **Pagan** festival for the **winter solstice** called Yule. During this festival, Pagans hang wheels of evergreen branches and light candles. Even today, Yule is still celebrated by many people in a similar way.

In 1839, the first Advent wreath that looked like those used today was made by Johann Wichern in Hamburg, Germany. Using an old cart wheel, Johann decorated it with evergreen branches and candles. Then, he used it to help the children in his mission school count down the days until Christmas.

## The Branches of an Advent Wreath

Advent wreaths are made up of a ring of evergreen branches. Holly, pine and ivy are often used as they can represent eternal life.

## Advent Candles

In many Christian churches, purple and pink candles are used but sometimes blue or red candles are used instead. Various churches also include a white candle in the middle that is lit on Christmas Eve and always represents Jesus. Each candle is lit in a certain order over the period of Advent.

## Did You Know...?

Many Christians believe that the Advent wreath is circular because it represents God's everlasting love and life.



## The Meaning of the Candles

### Week One

The Candle of Hope or the Prophecy Candle is lit. It represents the prophets who predicted Jesus' birth.

### Week Two

The Candle of Preparation or the Bethlehem Candle is lit. It often is linked to Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem but can be connected to the Bible or faith.

### Week Three

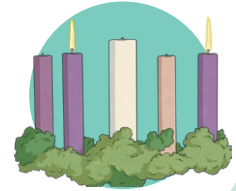
The Candle of Joy or the Shepherd's Candle is lit on **Gaudete** Sunday. It is often pink and stands for the joy of Jesus' birth. It can also often represent Mary.

### Week Four

The Candle of Love or the Angel's Candle is lit. This often represents the angels' news about Jesus' birth but it can also represent peace or John the Baptist.

### Christmas Eve

In many churches, the central white candle that represents Jesus is lit.



## Glossary

**gaudete:** Latin for the word rejoice.

**Pagan:** People that don't follow any of the world's major religions.

**winter solstice:** The shortest day of the year.



# Questions

1. Which candle is often linked to Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem? Tick one.

- the Candle of Hope
- the Candle of Love
- the Candle of Joy
- the Candle of Preparation

2. In which week is the Prophecy Candle lit? Tick one.

- week one
- week two
- week three
- week four

3. What does Yule celebrate? Tick one.

- the summer solstice
- the winter solstice
- Christmas
- Advent

4. Which week of Advent has Gaudete Sunday in it? Tick one.

- week one
- week two
- week three
- week four

5. Fill in the missing words.

During this \_\_\_\_\_, Pagans hang wheels of evergreen branches and light \_\_\_\_\_.

6. Look at the **Did You Know...?** box.

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'endless' or 'never-ending'.

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7. What surprised you the most about Advent wreaths? Explain your answer.

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