

Advent is the time period when many Christians count down to Christmas and think about the meaning of the Nativity story in their lives.

The History and Origins of Advent Wreaths

Centuries before Christianity spread throughout Europe, wreaths and candles have been used to celebrate a **Pagan** festival for the **winter solstice** called Yule. As a symbol of the eternal cycle of life, Pagans hang wheels of evergreen branches or give them as gifts. Pagans also light candles to represent the Sun. Even today, Yule is still celebrated by many people in a similar way.

The first modern Advent wreath was made by Johann Wichern in Hamburg, Germany, in 1839. The children in his mission school kept asking him how long it was until Christmas so he decorated an old cart wheel with evergreen branches and candles and used it to count down the days with them.

The Branches of an Advent Wreath

Created as a ring of various evergreen branches, many Christians believe that the Advent wreath is shaped as a circle because it can represent continuous life and God's everlasting love. The holly in the wreath can sometimes represent Jesus' crown of thorns. Pine and ivy are commonly used as they are often considered to be symbols of eternal life.

Advent Candles

Over the period of Advent, each candle is lit on a Sunday. In various Christian churches, the four main Advent candles are purple and pink. Purple is the traditional colour of Advent. In some Christian churches, blue or red candles are used instead. Blue can represent the night sky and red is often considered the colour of **communion**. Many churches also include a white candle in the middle that is lit on Christmas Eve and always represents Jesus.



The Meaning of the Candles

Each candle has its own special meaning in addition to its colour.

Week One

In various churches, the Candle of Hope or the Prophecy Candle is lit. It is symbolic of the prophets who predicted Jesus' birth.



Week Two

In some churches, the Candle of Preparation or the Bethlehem Candle is lit. It often represents the Bible or faith and is linked to Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem.



Week Three

Next, the Candle of Joy or the Shepherd's Candle is lit on **Gaudete** Sunday. It is often pink and is symbolic of the joy of Jesus' birth but can also often represent Mary.



Week Four

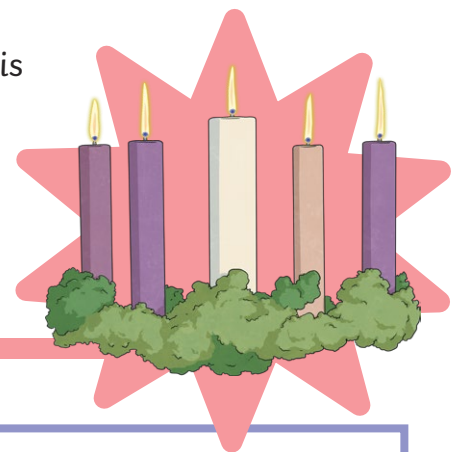
Finally, the Candle of Love or the Angel's Candle is lit. This is often symbolic of the angels' proclamation but can also represent peace or John the Baptist.



Christmas Eve

In many Christian churches, the central white candle is lit. This is known as the Christ Candle and represents Jesus.

Candles and evergreen branches have been used as Pagan symbols of light and the cycle of life for hundreds of years. Now, they are used by many Christians as Advent wreaths.



Glossary

communion: The sharing of thoughts and feelings, often for religious purposes.

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. What story do many Christians think about during Advent? Tick one.

- the story of Noah's ark
- the Nativity story
- the Easter story
- the story of Moses

2. Draw **four** lines and match each candle colour to its meaning.

pink

red

blue

purple

This colour is often considered the colour of communion.

This colour can represent the night sky.

The candle that is this colour can sometimes represent Mary.

This colour is the traditional colour of Advent.

3. When is the white candle lit in many churches?

4. Fill in the missing words.

Created as a ring of _____ evergreen branches, many Christians believe that the Advent wreath is shaped as a circle because it can represent _____ life and God's everlasting love.

5. Look at the section called **The History and Origins of Advent Wreaths**. Find and copy one word that means the same as 'an image or sign that represents something'.

6. Do you think Johann Wichern enjoyed creating his Advent wreath? Explain your answer.

7. If you could change the Advent wreath, how would you change it and why?

8. Would you like to have an Advent wreath in your house? Explain your answer.
