

# Family Prayers for the Advent Season

## The Advent Wreath

The Advent Wreath, a venerable European tradition, can be a way to involve even very little children in learning about Christian preparation — not only for celebrating Our Lord’s birth, but to make our hearts truly ready to receive Him.

The wreath’s symbolism of the advent (coming) of Light into the world is clear. The gradual lighting of the four candles — one on each Sunday of the Advent season — combined with

the liturgical colors of the candles (purple is the penitential color used during Advent and Lent; rose is a liturgical color used only on Gaudete Sunday in Advent and Laetare Sunday in Lent) help to symbolize not only our expectation and hope in Our Savior’s first coming into the world, but also in His Second Coming as Judge at the end of the world.

The wreath itself is also symbolic. The circle of evergreen in which the candles are placed represents everlasting life. The seedpods, nuts, and cones used to decorate the wreath are symbolic of resurrection, and fruits represent the nourishing fruitfulness of the Christian life.

Gathering materials for the wreath — perhaps on an outing in the park or woods or even in the backyard — and assembling it at home is an interesting family project in which even the youngest children can participate.

On the first Sunday of Advent, you may sprinkle the wreath with holy water and bless it before lighting the first purple candle. The appropriate Advent collect can be said as the candle(s) are lighted each day of the week, followed by the blessing before meals, if you use the wreath at mealtime. The second Sunday, light two purple candles; the third Sunday, two purple and one rose; and light all the candles on the fourth Sunday.

Children who are old enough can take turns lighting the candles. (The littlest ones can blow them out at the end of the meal.) If you use the wreath at mealtime, it is helpful to place it on a tray or platter so it can be moved, and to protect the table from candle wax.



On Christmas Day, all the greens and decorations are replaced with fresh ones, and four new white candles, symbolizing Christ, replace the colored ones and are burned throughout the Christmas season. The Advent season is a good time to pray the Angelus at family meals.

## Blessing for the Advent Wreath

O God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth thy blessing upon this wreath and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the Coming of Christ, and may receive from thee abundant graces. Through Christ Our Lord. + **Amen.**

## Collects for Advent

These prayers — traditional English translations of the Latin collects, or opening prayers, for the four Sundays — may be said every evening when the Advent wreath is lighted.

### First Week

Stir up thy power, O Lord, and come, that by thy protection we may be rescued from the dangers that beset us through our sins; and be a Redeemer to deliver us; Who livest and reignest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. + **Amen.**

In English-speaking countries, the first Sunday of Advent was called “Stirrup Sunday,” because the “stir up” of the collect was the signal to begin to “stir up” the fruits for the baking of Christmas cakes and puddings.

### Second Week

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the paths of thine only begotten Son: that we may worthily serve thee with hearts purified by His coming: Who livest and reignest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. + **Amen.**

### Third Week

We beseech thee to listen to our prayers, O Lord, and by the grace of thy coming enlighten our darkened minds: Thou who livest and reignest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. + **Amen.**

On the third Sunday in Advent, Gaudete Sunday, the Church can no longer contain her joyful longing for the coming of the Savior. We light the rose candle and rejoice that our redemption is so close at hand. *Gaudete* comes from the Latin antiphon that begins

*“Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, gaudete.”* [Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice.] On this day, rose-colored vestments are worn, and flowers may decorate the chancel of the church.

#### Fourth Week

Pour forth thy power, O Lord, and come: Assist us by that mighty power, so that by thy grace and merciful kindness we may swiftly receive the salvation that our sins impede: Who livest and reignest with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. + **Amen.**

#### Blessing before Meals

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty. Through Christ Our Lord. + **Amen.**

#### Blessing after Meals

We give thee thanks, almighty God, for all your benefits: who livest and reignest forever and ever. + **Amen.**

May the Lord grant us His peace.

**And life everlasting. Amen.**

And may the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. + **Amen.**



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# Advent



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