**THE ADVENT WREATH**

Of all the symbols of the Advent season, the most familiar is the Advent wreath. Each week a new candle is lit as a way of marking the weeks leading to Christmas.

The origins of the Advent wreath are in the folk practices of pre-Christian northern Europe, where, during the cold darkness of winter, people made wreaths of evergreen and lit fires as signs of hope of life in spite of the dark and cold of winter.  Christians kept these traditions alive and by the 16th century, Christians in Germany used evergreens and fire as symbols to celebrate Advent and renewed hope in the birth and person of Christ.

There is rich symbolic meaning in the Advent wreath. The wreath in the shape of a circle reminds us of the eternity, mystery and endless grace of God. The green colour of the boughs that compose the wreath points to the hope in new and everlasting life. The candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of the Christ who is the light that shines in the darkness.

Often each of the four Sundays of Advent is assigned a theme in the following order: hope, peace, joy, and love.

The four outer candles (often purple or blue) represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent, which themselves have come to symbolize the four centuries of waiting between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Christ. The last candle to be lit, the central Christ Candle (often white), symbolizes the purity, peace, and centrality of Christ.

Below are some liturgies to use when lighting the Advent candles.

Advent 1 (light one candle): Hope

One: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Many: We are easily distracted by the darkness that comes with unease and anxiety.

All: Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your renewing hope.

Advent 2 (light two candles): Peace

One: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Many: We are easily distracted by the darkness of force and power and we often choose strife and turmoil.

All: Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your everlasting peace.

Advent 3 (light three candles): Joy

One: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Many: We are easily distracted by the darkness of despair or pessimism.

All: Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your life-giving joy.

Advent 4 (light four candles): Love

One: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Many: We are easily distracted by the darkness of isolation and fear.

All: Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your unending love.

Christmas (light five candles):

One: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Many: We are easily distracted by our old lives and with history and by what has been.

One: Christ is born among us and our hope is made new.

All: Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your transforming power.

OR

Leader: We light the candle of Hope as we await the coming of Jesus, who is the

 source of hope.

**People: We give thanks for the gift of hope in a time of despair.**

Leader: We light the candle of Peace, knowing that Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

**People: We give thanks for the gift of peace in times of uncertainty.**

Leader: We light the candle of Joy, knowing that our comfort and help come from

 God.

**People: We give thanks for the gift of joy in a time of sadness.**

Leader: We light the candle of Love, knowing that God is Love revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

**People: We give thanks for the gift of love in a time of loneliness.**

Leader: We light the Christ Candle knowing that Jesus is the Light of the world

**People: The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.**