

## ADVENT WREATH

A small group of book lovers from our parish meets on Thursdays and discusses a book they have been reading in the past week. It is called the 'Book changes life' group. During the last meeting, the discussion was about Advent, and precisely about the Advent Wreath. Starting with the Advent Wreath, a lot of symbols and traditions go with our Christmas celebration, which has no Biblical roots to say the least. It could be both fun and spiritually elevating to explore them. Let us begin with the Advent wreath this Sunday.

It is a German Lutheran tradition started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Over the centuries, it has transformed into a Western Christian practice, breaking the boundaries of denominations.

A Lutheran Pastor in Germany, Johann Hinrich Wichern, who was a missionary among the urban poor, is considered the inventor of the modern Advent Wreath. During Advent, children at the mission school would ask if Christmas had arrived. In 1839, he took a large wooden ring from a cartwheel and decorated it with 24 small red candles and four large white candles. One small red candle each was lit on weekdays and Saturdays, while one large white candle each was lit on Sundays. The custom got popular among the Protestant churches, and evolved to the form today with four or five candles as we see today. The Catholics in Germany began to adopt the custom in the 1920s. The custom gained acceptance in North America in the 1930's both among Catholics and among other denominations. Thus, we have the Advent Wreath, a fairly new tradition in the church.

The wreath is circular, representing the infinite love of God; and it is made of evergreen leaves to represent the hope of eternal life brought by Jesus Christ. The four candles represent the four weeks of the Advent season and the four basic virtues: hope, peace, joy, and love.

The Advent is about waiting. Think of the last wait you had. It might be at the airport for the next flight, or you might wait impatiently at the doctor's office. There are among us parents waiting, both excited and worried for the arrival of their child. For the last couple of weeks, grandparents were waiting impatiently for Thanksgiving to spend some quality time with their children and grandchildren.

Waiting has contrasting emotions attached to it: it has both fear and hope, it has love and agony, it has excitement, yet anxiety too. Waiting makes us impatient.

Think of the poor children of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; they were impatient to celebrate Christmas. The Advent wreath was originally designed to make their countdown easy. They were waiting for Christmas to arrive. They were waiting with fasting, penance, and prayer.

Above all, the Advent Wreath reminds us to wait for His arrival with fasting, penance, and prayer. Three of the four Advent candles are violet, the liturgical color representing fasting, penance, and prayer. The rose color represents the excitement and joy of the immediate arrival of Jesus. The central white candle is called the Christ candle; it needs no explanation.

Let us join Our Lady and St. Joseph, and the multitude of prophets, kings, holy men and women, who had waited patiently and excitedly for the arrival of the Messiah.

Amen.