

The Symbolism of the Advent Wreath



A wreath is always in the form of a circle. A circle has no beginning and no end. Thus, it is a symbol for God Who is eternal, having no beginning or end.

The circle is made of evergreens. These branches, as the name states, are “ever green” (i.e., ever alive). They are symbolic of Christ, Who died, but Who is alive, never to die again. They also symbolize our own immortality of the soul. Christ came into the world to give us never-ending life.

Entwined among the circle of evergreens are red holly berries. These are like drops of blood. They symbolize that Christ came into this world to die for us. It is through the shedding of His blood that we have eternal life. The wreath contains four candles, three violet and one rose.

These symbolize the four weeks of the Advent season, our preparation for Christmas. Each day, the Liturgy tells us of the expectation of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels begin to introduce us to the characters of the Christmas story. Each week another candle is lit. As the light from the wreath increases each week as it grows brighter, it reminds us that the birth of the Light of the World is coming closer. So, may our souls grow brighter as this season of grace continues. The violet color is not so much representing the penitential attitude of Lent, but rather a seriousness and somber mood of preparation. The one rose candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday. Rose is a mixture of violet and white. It is as if the joy to be celebrated at Christmas, bright white, cannot be contained and bursts forth a little into the Advent season.

At the base of each candle, or in one place on the wreath itself, there should be (a) blue bow(s). This is to remind us of Mary, the Mother of God, who bore Him in her womb and brought Him forth into our world.

At Christmas time, the four candles should be replaced with all white tapers. The Advent wreath should be in a prominent place in the church. Many families also have a smaller wreath in their homes. This home wreath both reminds families of the wreath in their church and is a connection to their local parish. The candles are lit at the main meal of the day, with the new candle lit preferably at the main meal on Sunday. Joining around the table at home should also remind the family of the table of the Lord around which they gather each week to celebrate the Eucharist.