

# PRAYING WITH THE ADVENT WREATH WEEK ONE



A FUTURE  
FULL OF HOPE  
CLIFTON DIOCESE

## Praying with the Advent Wreath

One of the most iconic symbols of Advent is that of the Advent Wreath. It is a beautiful symbol of the eternity of Christ and his presence in our lives. As a symbol, however, apart from being lit on each of the Sundays of Advent, the deeper meaning held within each of those candles is often lost or unacknowledged. This is a pity because there is a richness in the wreath which offers a real opportunity for reflecting in a prayerful way this beautiful season of preparation for Christmas. Before we look at how we might use our Advent Wreath for a time of reflection let us remind ourselves of its origins.

The Advent Wreath was first used as Christian devotion in the Middle Ages. Its design comes from the customs of the pre-Christian Germanic and Scandinavian cultures, where candles and greenery were used as symbols of light and life during the dark and cold winter. The Advent Wreath has always been a circular evergreen wreath with four or five candles, three purple, one rose and sometimes a white candle for Christmas Day placed in the centre of the wreath.

The candles symbolise the light of Christ coming into the world. The evergreen symbolises renewal and the circular shape the completeness of God. The candle colours come from the traditional liturgical colours of Advent, (purple and rose) and Christmas (white). Each candle is lit on the appropriate Sunday of Advent and then the candles can be lit each day according to the week. Overtime each candle was given a name and linked to a particular part of the Advent story.

- Candle 1. Hope (purple)
- Candle 2. Peace (purple)
- Candle 3. Joy (rose)
- Candle 4. Love (purple)

Praying with a focus on each candle can really help us to reflect as we journey through Advent. Just taking fifteen or twenty minutes each day to pray can enrich our appreciation of the season which so often can be overtaken by the need to shop endlessly, bake, send out invites etc. Simply giving a short period of time allows us to breathe and refocus on why we are doing all this preparation in the first place.

What follows is a format that this prayer time might take and some reflection questions for each of the weeks; it can be done as a family, a parish community or as an individual.





## of Hope

### WEEK ONE

- Gather around the Advent Wreath and light the first candle
- Have a moment of silence and then start with a prayer:

#### Prayer

O Emmanuel, Prince of Peace,  
Desire of the nations, Saviour of all people,  
Come and set us free, Lord, our God.

#### Luke: 2:22-32

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon;[a] this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.



## **‘Simeon with Jesus’ by Andrey Shishkin**

Russian Painter Andrey Shishkin. He is famous in Russia for his portrait painting. Here is this work he focuses on Simeon holding the baby Jesus. In our reading we hear about Simeon’s life of hope that one day, before he dies, he will see the Lord. When eventually this happens, he is filled with joy and peace.



### **Discuss/Reflect**

*What do you see in the painting?*

*What feelings does it evoke?*

*How does the painter use light?*

*What do you like or dislike about the painting?*

Following your discussion about the painting have a time of silent reflection. Do not rush this but allow people to ponder the questions below:

*For what do you hope for personally?*

*For what do you hope for in the wider world?*

*Other than presents what is your real hope for, this Christmas?*

At the end of the time of reflection if you have time you may wish to share your thoughts if you are praying together as a family or parish community.

### **Time to Act**

*In what ways might you, your family or your community be a sign of hope in the week to come?*

**Conclude** with a prayer – such as,

Lord God, you promised hope to the Israelites and you kept your promise. You promised hope in the coming of your Son and he was hope for the world. You promise hope to each one of us and we pray for your continued faithfulness.

Lord, we pray for strength to remain true to all you offer us.

Fill us with confidence in your presence in our lives.

Fill us with joy and peace as we go through this busy time of year. Amen.

