

PRAYING WITH THE ADVENT WREATH WEEK THREE



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 Joy

Week Three

- Gather around the Advent Wreath and light two of the purple candles and the rose candles
- Have a moment of silence and then start with the prayer

Prayer

God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the centre, the focus of our lives
always, and particularly this Advent time.

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.



Joy in the Village by Marc Chagall



Many of Chagall's works present life and love against the backdrop of a village, sometimes "my village," sometimes "the village," sometimes the backdrop is Mediterranean Nice, but whichever village we see, it is always an offshoot of that archetypal village in which Chagall and his family and generations of people like those in his family are born, live, love, joy, suffer, and die.

Discuss/Reflect

What strikes you about the picture?

Where, if at all, is there hope in the picture?

What feelings does it evoke in you?

In what ways might it speak to us of joy, liberty, good news?

Personal Reflection - A story is told of a Head Teacher who ran a secondary school for boys. The boys were often in trouble and the Head could be quite hard on them. One Christmas season, as the boys were busy preparing the Christmas crib, one of them accidentally broke one of the statues made of ceramics. The other boys were convinced that the poor boy would be in serious trouble. However, when the Head came along and saw what had happened, she responded quite calmly. Bending down she began to put the broken statue back together piece by piece. As she did she saw the astonished look on the boys faces. She paused and then said to them, "Don't be surprised. Did you not know that this is what Jesus came to do at Christmas, namely to heal our brokenness and make us joyful, despite our weaknesses."

Are their parts of you that are broken?

In what ways would you like to be healed?

Who or what needs healing in your family or community?

Where do you find joy in your life and how might you share it?

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.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God, you promised freedom to the Israelites and you kept your promise. You promised hope in the coming of your Son and he was good news for the world. You promise joy 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.

