



WHAT IS ADVENT?

During the weeks of Advent, we will join together, each of us anticipating the announcement of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in Bethlehem and in our hearts. Every Sunday, during this time, we gather around the advent wreath, symbolically preparing to receive our savior. Every week we light a new candle, representing a different aspect of this hope and waiting. With each candle, the foggy blanket of sin that covers us begins to dissipate and the light of our Lord grows clearer and stronger in our hearts and souls.

Since we have a number of first time attenders today who may not be familiar with the celebration of Advent, we'd like to share a little about the meaning and history of this custom: Advent began many centuries ago in Germany as a way of visually and symbolically preparing for and anticipating the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the eternal light. Today, Advent is celebrated by Christians throughout the world.

The green foliage on the advent wreath is an evergreen, which symbolizes eternity. The circular shape of the wreath also symbolizes eternity – the eternal love and mercy of God, which has no beginning or end. Holly is often used with its sharp leaf points representing the crown of thorns worn by Jesus Christ. The red berries symbolize the blood of Christ.

The candles symbolize the light of God that entered the world through the birth of God's son, Jesus Christ. This light brings newness and hope to a dark world and reminds us that we are to be the light of the world as we reflect the light of God's grace to others. The four outside candles represent periods of waiting during the four weeks of Advent - They symbolize the four centuries of waiting in-between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Christ (end of Old Testament and beginning of New Testament). Their specific meaning varies in each church. Our 4 blue candles represent: LIGHT & HOPE and anticipation of the coming Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament; PEACE; LOVE; and the JOY of the advent of the Christ. The large white candle in the middle is the CHRIST candle which we will light on Christmas Eve. Its location reminds us that the incarnation is the heart of the season, giving light to the world.

The progression in the lighting of the candles symbolizes the various aspects of our waiting experience. As the candles are lighted over the four week period, it also symbolizes the darkness of fear and hopelessness receding and the shadows of sin falling away as more and more light is shed into the world. The flame of each new candle reminds worshippers that something is happening, and that more is yet to come. Finally, the light that has come into the world is plainly visible as the Christ candle is lighted at Christmas, and worshippers rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has been realized. The exact symbolism of this wreath and its candles is not as important as the history into which it invites us to hear and participate. Every week, a different family in our church will help us in the lighting of the candles.