**Advent Candle Meanings and Traditions**

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Advent is the period of anticipation roughly between Thanksgiving and [Christmas](https://christmas.lovetoknow.com/how-did-christmas-start) leading up to the celebration of Jesus' birth. Families traditionally use their Advent candle wreaths [as centerpieces](https://candles.lovetoknow.com/Slideshow%3AIdeas_for_Candle_Centerpieces) and light a specific number of candles each week during dinner followed by a meaningful reading.

**The Four Sundays of Advent**

To figure out the four Sundays of Advent, count back the four Sundays before Christmas. Advent begins on that first Sunday which usually is sometime between November 27th and December 3rd. Many churches provide their congregants with an Advent calendar to help them track the days. Some of these calendars can be simple paper sheets and others can be quite elaborate.

**Lighting the Advent Candles**

The four Advent candles represent the four weeks of Advent and should be lit in a specific order. All four candles are placed [in a wreath](https://crafts.lovetoknow.com/wiki/How_to_Make_Christmas_Wreaths) with three of one color, usually purple or violet, and one of a single color, usually pink or rose or in some traditions, white. The candles are placed in order with the single color candle placed third in order. Some people will also place a white candle in the middle of the wreath.

1. On the first Sunday, one of the purple candles is lit in the evening and it is lit every night until the following Sunday, when it is lit along with the second purple candle.
2. The two purple candles are lit every night until the third Sunday, when they are lit along with the pink candle, and then these three are lit every night until the fourth Sunday.
3. On the four Sunday, all four candles are lit and are lit each night for the following week.
4. Each time you light any of the candles, it is traditional to make the Sign of the Cross first. The candles are blown out at the end of each evening, followed by the Sign of the Cross.

**Advent Candle Names**

Each candle has a specific meaning related to the birth of Christ.

**The Prophecy Candle**

The first purple, or violet candle, is the Prophecy Candle symbolizes hope and God's forgiveness toward man. It also can symbolize the expectation of the coming of the Messiah.

**The Bethlehem Candle**

The second purple or violet candle symbolizes faith and reminds Catholics about the experience of Joseph and Mary in the city of Bethlehem.

**The Shepherd's Candle**

The third candle which is pink or rose, represents Gaudette Sunday and the joy that the birth of Christ brought to the world. Traditionally, on Gaudette Sunday one takes a break from Advent fasting to experience the joy of the day. The Shepherd's candle is sometimes white instead of rose or pink.

**The Angel's Candle**

The last purple candle is the Angel's Candle and represents the peace and justice that the angels and Christ brings to the world. It also can represent purity.

**The Christ Candle**

If a white candle in the middle of the wreath is included, this candle is lit on [Christmas Eve](https://christmas.lovetoknow.com/Christmas_Eve) or Christmas Day and represents Christ and purity. The Christ Candle is lit every night until the [Feast of the Epiphany](https://christmas.lovetoknow.com/little-christmas), which is twelve days from Christmas.



**The Colors of Advent**

Advent candle meaning is slightly different in each faith because the [colors of the candles](http://www.crivoice.org/cyadvent.html) can be different and the overall meaning of the event varies.

* Purple or violet: This traditional color symbolizes penitence, or regret for sins, and penance, or self-imposed punishment for a sin. As the color of royalty, purple also speaks to the birth of the new King, Jesus and serves as a reminder of his suffering.
* Pink or rose: Most often used on the third or fourth week, pink represents rejoicing. As many people see the end to their fasting approaching, they prepare to celebrate.
* Blue: Resembling the night sky or the waters in Genesis blue can also symbolize royalty. This color represents hope. Blue is used in place of purple by some Protestant denominations and Mozarabic Rites found in Southern Europe.
* Red: As a symbol for communion and a prominent Christmas color, [red candles](http://www.traditioninaction.org/Questions/F070_Wreath.htm) have German roots or can be used to promote religious unity.
* Green: When used in Advent, [green represents](http://www.peacejanesville.com/home/140001568/140001568/docs/Bul%2012-14-2016%20GREEN--The%20Colors%20of%20the%20Christmas%20Season%20SS.pdf?sec_id=140001568) faith or the spiritual life.
* White: A large [white pillar candle](https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-history-of-the-advent-wreath.html) in the center of the wreath represents Christ and the peace he brings.
* Gold: This opulent color represents love and kingship and symbolizes the [Christmas holiday season](http://www.lordoflifelutheranrc.org/blog/the-liturgical-colors-of-the-lutheran-church) in some religions.



**Advent Wreath Religious Meanings**

Advent wreaths and candles are more than another [holiday decoration](https://christmas.lovetoknow.com/Religious_Christmas_Decorations). These symbolic items represent the beliefs of [different religions](http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201511/why-are-advent-candles-pink-and-purple-30471) in a way that recognizes why they are celebrating Christmas.

* For many Christians of varying denominations, Advent is seen as a time to prepare for the celebration of Christ's arrival. Each candle represents one aspect of the waiting and is lit to signify Jesus bringing light into people's lives.
* In Catholic households, the first two candles are purple in conjunction with the color of penance and the color worn by priests, the third is pink for the color of rejoicing, and the fourth is also purple.
* Orthodox Christians observe Advent for 40 days [using six candles](https://www.st-philip.net/files/Bulletins%20plus/Advent-Wreath.pdf) with one each in green, blue, gold, white, purple, and red.
* Some Lutheran churches in the U.S. use four blue candles to represent hope and expectation while others follow the Catholic version.
* In Protestant churches, you will often find blue candles used as well or instead of the purple candles because their view of advent reflects more on hope and expectation rather than an arrival and preparation.



**A Household Tradition**

Advent wreaths are often used by families in the home, not necessarily in a church. These personal ceremonies speak to each family member's beliefs and values about the holiday season.