

Most popular of the Advent customs handed down to us is the Advent wreath made of evergreens. The wreath represents the cycle of thousands of years from Adam to Christ during which the world awaited the coming of a Redeemer. The wreath bears four candles, equally spaced, three purple ones to be lighted on the 'penitential' Sundays, and a rose-colored one for GAUDATE SUNDAY, the joyful Sunday in Advent. Candles may be placed inside or outside the wreath.

During Advent, time should be spent reading from Sacred Scripture. Therefore, certain readings have been selected and are suggested for Advent reading. These readings are taken from various of the Prophets, and they foretell the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The best time for such reading is during the lighting of the Advent wreath. The entire Family should be gathered around the wreath, and all should take part in the ceremony. This can be done at any convenient time. The Father (or in his absence the Mother) should be the leader.

Wednesday, Friday and Saturday of the Third week are Ember Days. These are special days and they are days of Fasting and Abstinence. This means that no meat may be eaten on these days. These are days, also, of special prayers.

Various home ceremonies on Christmas Eve are perhaps the easiest of all to establish. Where children are very small they are the surest link between Altar and home. If they believe in Santa Claus, this emphasis on Christmas as the Feast of Baby Jesus and His Birthday will focus their thoughts on the Holy Child. A suggested practice is for the older members of the family to gather in a darkened living room. All might be holding lighted candles. Through the halls, the children with lighted candles come in a procession carrying the Infant JESUS for the living room crib, while all sing "Silent Night". The crib should have been built and carefully prepared sometime earlier during Advent. The assistance of the youngest child in this project of building the crib for Baby Jesus is most important. By the time the children reach the living room the Father of the Family is ready to light the tree. As soon as the Infant Jesus has been placed in the crib, one of the members of the Family reads from the Roman Martyrology:

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"In the forty-second year of the Empire of Octavian Augustus, in the Sixth Age of the world while all the earth was at peace, JESUS CHRIST, Eternal God, and Son of the Eternal Father, willed to consecrate the world by His gracious coming; having been conceived of the Holy Ghost, and the nine months since His conception having now passed (ALL KNEEL), He was born as Man of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem of Juda.

(READ VERY SOLEMNLY):

THE BIRTHDAY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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After this has been completed, the Father of the Family blesses the Christmas Tree.

He says:

"Let us Pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who by dying on the tree of the Cross didst overcome the death of sin caused by our first parents' eating of the forbidden tree of paradise, bless this our Christmas Tree, so that in its use we can obtain even more of the Graces of Thy Nativity. Keep Thy holy peace and joy in our home and be with us forever. Amen.

The next day (Christmas Day), after all have given glory to God and to His Son Jesus Christ by attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, at a convenient hour, all should gather around the Christmas Tree once again, and all of Santa's gifts are opened.

The Advent wreath Ceremony and readings on reverse side of this page.