

PREPARING FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT!

THE ADVENT WREATH HELPS US AS WE GET READY TO WELCOME JESUS

Light has always been a symbol of hope in the darkness. Long before Jesus was born, we know that the people of Eastern Europe made wreaths of evergreen branches and added lighted candles as a sign of hope in the dark days of winter. This was a reminder to them that spring was on its way. In the northern European countries, lights were placed on wheels and prayers were offered to the god of light to turn the wheel of the earth back towards the sun. By the 1500s, Christians had adapted this tradition and were using Advent Wreaths as part of their preparation for Christmas. In the 17th century, the Advent Wreath was used throughout Germany to mark the time spent waiting for the birth of the Christ child at Christmas. From Germany, this tradition spread to the rest of the world.



WHAT DOES THE ADVENT WREATH MEAN?

Usually, the Advent Wreath is made of four candles, three purple and one pink. The candles remind us that Jesus is the light that has come into the world. (John 3:19) We use four candles to represent the four weeks of Advent. The colour purple is used because, long ago, purple dye was very expensive and purple became a colour that was associated with royalty. Advent is the season of the coming of the King. The pink one is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete Sunday*, which means Joyful Sunday or the Sunday of Rejoicing. We rejoice because we are more than half way through our preparation for Christmas. Long ago, Advent was a time of fasting, like Lent. On the Third Sunday, there was a break from this fast and the priests wore rose or pink coloured vestments. So that tradition became a part of the Advent Wreath. As we light the candles each week, we are made aware of our journey through this season. Placing the candles in a circle is symbolic of God's love for us, a love that has no beginning or end. The use of the evergreen leaves around the candles reminds us that God's love is everlasting.

HOW TO MAKE A SIMPLE ADVENT WREATH

There are lots of different ways to make an Advent Wreath. The following is a very simple art and craft activity for use with all age groups.

MATERIALS

Cardboard ring about 28 cms in diameter
4 candles; 3 purple, 1 pink
4 bottle caps
Green crepe paper
Glue

1. **Cut out a cardboard ring** of around 28cms in diameter. You can **colour** the ring green or use green strips of crepe paper to wrap around the ring, making sure to overlap the layers as you go.
2. **Glue the bottle caps to the bottom of the cardboard ring.** This will make a stand for the wreath.
3. **Glue on green shredded paper. You might like to add some pine cones, holly or other decorations.** *These are optional!*
4. **Glue the base of the candles to the wreath and make sure that they are very secure.** Use tall and thick candles that will last the season through.

HOW TO USE THE ADVENT WREATH

Place the Advent Wreath in your **Classroom Sacred Space**. Light the candles during prayer time for the four weeks of Advent. Candles are lit in the following sequence:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Week 1: | Light ONE Purple Candle |
| Week 2: | Light TWO Purple Candles |
| Week 3: | Light TWO Purple Candles & ONE Pink Candle |
| Week 4: | Light ALL Four Candles |



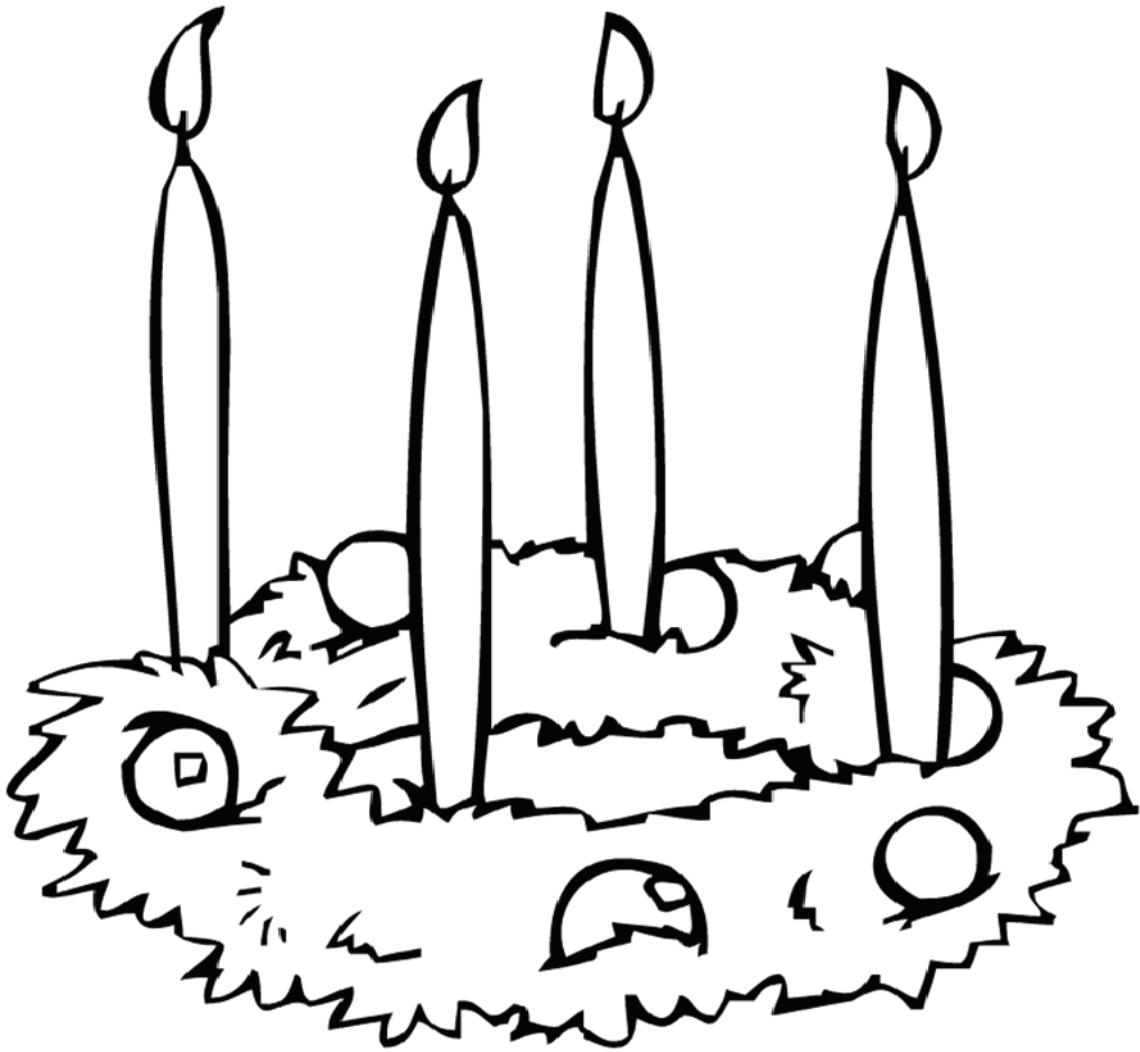
BLESSING FOR THE ADVENT WREATH:

You might like to invite the priest or chaplain to bless your Advent Wreath at the beginning of Advent. The following prayer may be used. Holy Water can be used to sprinkle and bless the wreath



*Loving God, bless our Advent Wreath.
May its light be a sign of Christ's coming, warming our hearts and
brightening our way as we journey towards Christmas Day. Amen*

Colour the Advent Wreath



Count the candles. Circle the right number

1 2 3 4

What colour are the candles?

Advent Calendar



Photocopy and cut out each of the Advent activities below and place them in a basket on the sacred space. Invite a different child every day to (a) select an activity for the class to do and (b) colour a star on the calendar opposite (start with number one). This can also be done as an individual activity for home or school – simply photocopy these pages for each child in the class.



Help your family to prepare a meal

Invite someone who has been left out to play with you

Say a prayer of thanks before eating your dinner today

Put some food out for the birds

Make a special effort to be patient at times when you have to wait

Visit a Church and ask for help to light a candle

Say “I’m sorry” to someone whom you’ve hurt or upset

Tidy your room without being asked

Say a prayer before bed tonight

Reuse or recycle your Christmas card envelopes

Phone or write to your Granny or Granddad today

Tell someone your favourite Bible story

Make a birthday card for Jesus and leave it beside the crib

Ask what you can do to help prepare your house for Christmas

Say a prayer for every person who sends a Christmas card to your family

Give a special hug to someone who takes care of you and say thank you to them

Pick up any litter in your school yard or around your house

Read the story of the Annunciation (Luke 1:28-38)

Share your sweets or toys with someone

Say a prayer for the people you know who have died

Make a Christmas card for someone who helps you in your school

Save all the used stamps from your Christmas cards and give them to charity

Read the story of the first Christmas (Luke 2:1-14)

Forgive someone who has hurt your feelings

Donate a toy to the local charity

ADVENT

A New Year for the Church

FACTS ABOUT THE CHURCH YEAR

- The Church year begins on the first Sunday of Advent and ends on the Feast of Christ the King.
- The Church year is divided into different seasons just like the calendar year.
- We can tell which season we are in by the different coloured vestments that the priest wears when celebrating Mass



In Advent the priest wears **purple**, the colour of royalty. This reminds us that we are waiting to welcome Christ, the King. The same colour is worn during Lent.

White or gold vestments are worn for the seasons of Christmas and Easter, times of great joy in the Church Year. These colours are also worn for the Feasts of Our Lord, such as the Baptism of The Lord and for Feasts of Mary such as the Immaculate Conception, which we celebrate during Advent.



In Ordinary Time the priest wears **green**. **Green** is a symbol of life and hope.

Red, the colour of blood, is worn on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, those days when we celebrate the passion of Jesus. **Red** is also the colour of fire which reminds us of the Holy Spirit. So, **red** vestments are worn on the Feast of Pentecost and for the sacrament of Confirmation.



The Church Year is also called the Liturgical Year.

There are **three Liturgical Years A, B, and C**. In each of these three years we hear the story of Jesus', birth, life, death and resurrection told from the point of view of the different writers of the Gospel.

In **Year A** most of the Gospels are from Matthew, in **Year B** from Mark and in **Year C** from Luke.

John's Gospel can be heard in all three years mostly during the Easter Season.

This year in Advent we begin **Year A!**

CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES

A Reflection for Teachers

During the course of the First World War, my grand-Uncle was fighting with the North Staffordshire Regiment on the Western Front. No-one knows why a soldier who had enlisted with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers had ended up with this British Regiment. During the Christmas of 1915 an unusual event happened – an unofficial Christmas truce. I don't know if he was there, but I'd like to think he was – seeing in the midst of a terrible war, a small moment of humanity and Christian goodness. By the following Christmas he would be dead, having died at the Somme in November 1916. The history of the Regiment tells the following story:

The 24th and 25th December 1914, saw the extraordinary spectacle of an unofficial truce between our troops and the Saxons who were opposite. Everything had been normal up to evening 'Stand down' and the Company Commander was having his supper in the Headquarters dug-out, when the Company Sergeant-Major put his head in and said 'What am I to do, Sir? The Germans are sitting on their parapets, lighting candles and singing hymns!' The Company Commander at once went out and mounting on the fire step saw small lights all along the German trenches and heard many voices uplifted in song.

He decided to consult with the Officer Commanding 'A' Company, who was the Senior Officer in the front line, and accordingly started to make his way down the trench towards 'A' Company Headquarters. On his way he surprised one of his men in the act of climbing out of the trench and discovered that there was a German soldier in 'No man's land,' who wanted to speak to a British soldier, so ordering his own man back, he slipped out himself to investigate.

The German turned out to be a private soldier who had been a waiter at Brighton, and was anxious to exchange cigars for bully beef. The Company Commander asked to be taken to an Officer, and was conducted to the German front line, where he found a group of German Officers standing by the wall of a ruined farmhouse. Christmas greetings were exchanged and finally the suggestion was made that Christmas Day might be observed as a day of rest and that the Infantry should not fire on each other, though of course, neither side could answer for their Artillery. It was then agreed that all Infantry fire should cease forthwith and that the informal truce should continue until 12pm on Christmas night.

The German spokesman then asked for permission to bury the dead. Burial parties then went out from both sides, leaving their trenches at 10am on Christmas Day, each side to bury the dead in their own half of 'No man's land.'

During all this time sufficient men were kept posted in our trenches to check any attempt at treachery and to prevent any of the enemy entering our trenches. The Germans evidently took the same precautions, for when Captain Ewald tried to get a peep into their front trench, he was promptly warned off by an invisible sentry. At dusk the men of both sides returned to their trenches, but no hostile act followed the expiry of the truce at 11pm.

Shortly after 'Stand down' next morning 'C' Company Commander was informed that a German Officer wishes to speak to him in 'No man's land'. On going out he found a very polite and spotless individual awaiting him, who, after an exchange of compliments, informed him that his Colonel had given orders for a renewal of hostilities at mid-day and might the men be warned to keep down, please? 'C' Company Commander thanked the German Officer for his courtesy, whereupon, saluting and bowing from the waist, he replied, 'We are Saxons; you are Anglo Saxons; word of a gentleman is for us as for you.'

The troops were duly warned to keep down, but just before hostilities were due to re-open a tin was thrown into 'A' Company's lines with a piece of paper in it bearing the inscription, 'We shoot to the air' and sure enough, at the appointed hour a few vague shots were fired over the trenches. Then all was quiet again and the unofficial truce continued.

John Paul Sheridan





THE JESSE TREE

The Jesse tree is like the family tree of Jesus. Its name comes from Jesse, who was the father of King David. Jesse and King David were ancestors of Jesus. The Jesse tree shows us more of the important people in the Old Testament. It shows us how long they waited for a king. We know that Jesus is the king that God promised to send. We use the Jesse Tree to remind us of God's promise.

CAN YOU FIND JESUS' ANCESTORS IN THE BIBLE?

Look in your Bible to find the names of Jesus' family. Write each name in the spaces below. Then match the person to the symbols at the side.

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Genesis 3:20 | |
| Genesis 7:1 | |
| Genesis 22:1 | |
| Exodus 19:20 | |
| Ruth 2:2 | |
| 2 Samuel 5: 3 | |
| Luke 3:16 | |
| Matthew 1:24 | |
| Luke 1:38 | |
| Matthew 2:2 | |

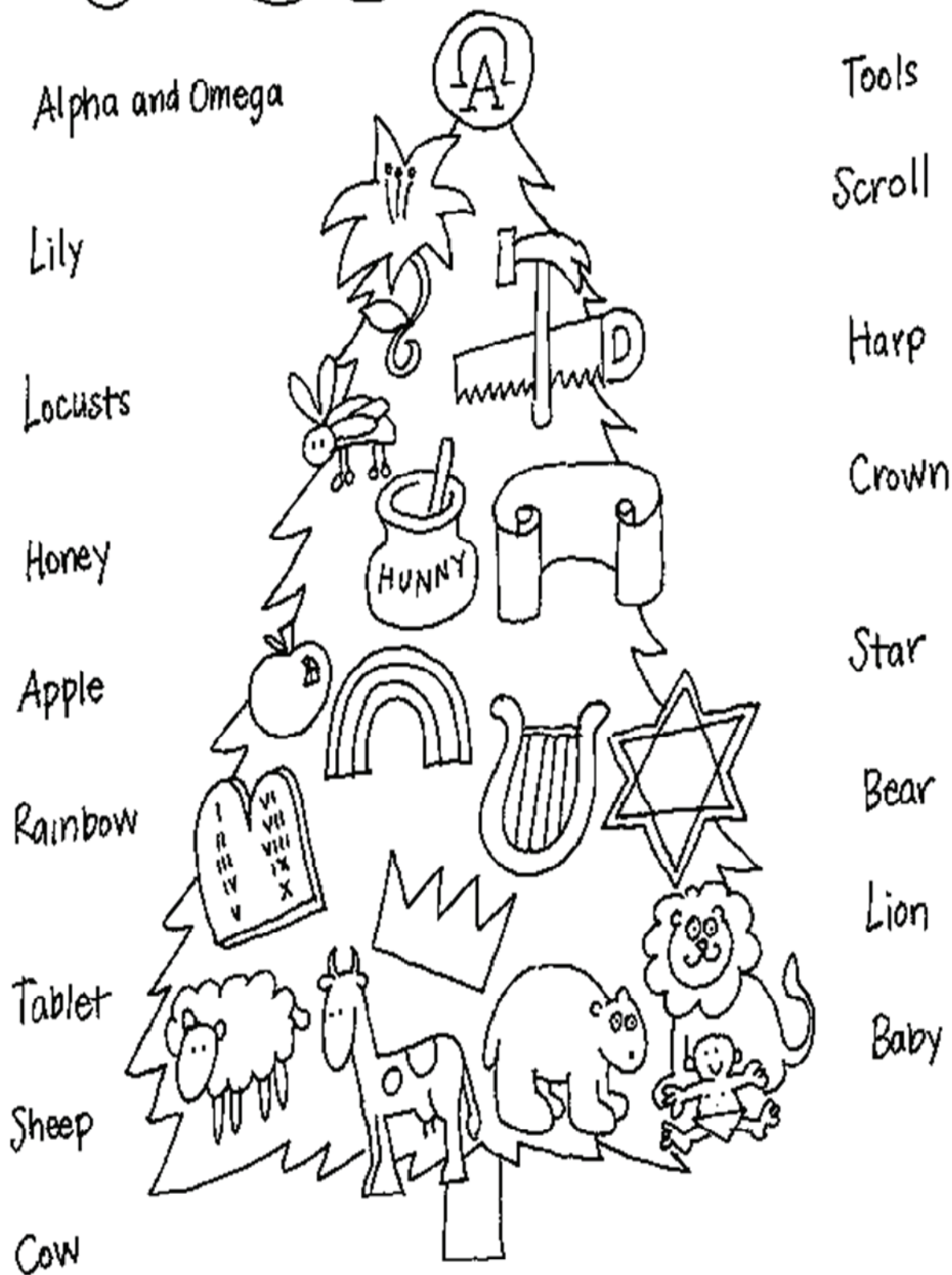


MAKE YOUR OWN JESSE TREE

It's fun to make your own Jesse Tree, either at home or in school. Just use a dead branch, or draw and cut out a branch on cardboard. You can use the symbols above and even add more! You can download these symbols from <http://images.rca.org/docs/discipleship/jessepatterns.pdf>.

Cut them out and colour them in, and then attach a string or coloured ribbon to hang them from the branch.

JESSE TREE





THE WORLD OF BEES

Since ancient times, people have had an enormous respect for the little bee – especially in ancient Greece, India and China. The bee has been a symbol of hope, social organisation, hard-work, and eloquence as in the case of St Ambrose. You can read more about St Ambrose on page 20. The bee was also a symbol of the origin of life, as it is central to the pollination of plants and flowers. The products of the bee were considered very valuable – honey was one of the first sources of something sweet for human beings and it was also used as medicine.

Beeswax was important for making candles. In the histories of monasteries, the cultivation of three products was of utmost importance – wax, wheat and grapes. Candles were for use in the Church. Wheat was used to make bread and grapes to make wine to celebrate the Eucharist.

The Chaldean (modern day Iraq) word for a bee is Dabar. It also means 'Word' and so the bee became a symbol of the Word of God, who is Jesus. At the beginning of the Gospel according to St John, he says, "*The Word became Flesh, and lived among us.*" This is a reference to Jesus coming and living among us – which is what is at the heart of our celebration of Christmas.

PRAYER SERVICE FOR THE BEGINNING OF ADVENT



INTRODUCTION: We gather together today to begin our school/class celebration for the season of Advent. During this special time, we prepare our minds and our hearts for Christmas. We all know that the baby Jesus was born long ago in Bethlehem. We must also remember that Jesus wants to come to live in our hearts and in our world every day. We use this special time of Advent to get ready to welcome Jesus.

OPENING SONG: *Waiting (Alive-O, p.101) or The Advent Hymn (Alive-O 5, p.114)*
During the opening song, symbols including the following could be brought to the sacred space: a candle, a Bible, a symbol for the Jesse Tree, an Advent calendar, a picture of the Holy Family.

ALL: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEADER: Let us listen to a reading from the Gospel according to St Luke. In it, John the Baptist tells the people what they should do to get ready to welcome Jesus.

READER: Everyone thought John was going to be the Great King, and they all began to get excited. But John said: 'I am not the Great King that God promised to send. Someone else is coming after me, and he is much more important than I am. In fact, he is so great that I am not even good enough to untie his shoe laces.' Lots of people came to John the Baptist and said: 'What have we got to do to get ready?' John said: 'Share things with each other, and don't be greedy.' c.f. Luke3:15-16

LEADER: Let us ask Jesus, our friend, to come into our lives during this Advent season.

READER: The response is: *Lord Jesus, come into our lives.*

When we are busy with many activities... (R)

When we are worried about our friends and family... (R)

When we forget to pray to you... (R)

When the world needs peace... (R)

When our hearts are sad ... (R)

When we fail to do good for others... (R)

When we are unkind in our words or actions... (R)



LEADER: Jesus, friend of children, help us to prepare for your coming by thinking of others and by living the way you taught us. Come into our lives during this special season of Advent so that we can bring your love to the world.

ALL: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: *Carol of the Journey (Alive-O, p.108) or Come and Be Born in Our Hearts (Alive-O 7, p.287)*