

**The Christmas Tree** - probably originates from medieval religious plays, The Paradise Plays, about creation from Adam & Eve in the Garden to the birth of Jesus. On stage during the play there was a great tree laden with apples, symbolizing Paradise. People then started the custom of putting a Paradise Tree laden with gifts & lighted candles in their home during the Christmas season to celebrate paradise regained through the coming of Christ.



#### **Prayer Around The Christmas Tree**

Long ago, God placed a tree in the Garden of Paradise as a gift to all human beings, a tree of wisdom & knowledge and laden with every good thing. Our Christmas tree reminds us of that tree. Long ago too, God appeared in the coming of Christ, who is our of eternal life. This tree is a sign of Christ's blessing.

**St. Francis & First Creche** - It was St. Francis who first popularized the Christmas crèche at Greccio, Italy in 1224. He has a stable made before Christmas and invited people to bring their animals and join him at 'Bethlehem'. This made the Christmas story easy to understand for people who could not read.

**Holly** with its green leaves, its prickly points & red berries, suggested that the child born in the manger would wear a crown of thorns with drops of blood.



**Mistletoe** is long associated in the pre-Christian world with healing and became a symbol of the healing power of Christ.

**Poinsettia** is from Central America, with its bright star like flower, it is a natural reminder of the Star of Bethlehem

**Presents** in some countries are given to children on behalf of the 3 Wise Men on the feast of The Epiphany who brought gold, frankincense & myrrh to baby Jesus.



## **The Meaning of Advent**



The origins of the advent wreath are found in the folk practices of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples, who during the cold December, gathered wreaths evergreen and lit fires as signs of hope for the coming spring and renewed light. Christians kept these popular traditions alive and by the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Catholics & Protestants throughout Germany used these symbols to celebrate their Advent hope in Christ, the everlasting light.

The Advent wreath spread to other parts of the Christian world. In Churches the wreaths can be found near the altar. The evergreen is in a circular form which reminds us of God and His love which is eternal. He has no beginning or end. The evergreen reminds us that God never changes.

The 3 purple candles represent each of the 3 weeks of Advent and are symbolic of the long, long weary waiting of God's people for the Saviour to come.

The pink candle, lit on Laetare - 'Rejoice' - Sunday (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday) represents our joy at the coming of Christ and is symbolic of the hope offered by the prophets.

The last candle is white and placed in the centre of the wreath and represents the Child Jesus, the Light of the World.

#### **Prayer While Lighting The Advent Candles**

O God, as light comes from this candle, may the blessing of Christ come to us, warming our hearts & brightening our way. May Christ our Saviour bring life into the darkness of this world, and to us, as we wait for His coming.



**Week 1** : O Emmanuel, Jesus Christ, desire of every nation, Saviour of all peoples, come and dwell among us.

**Week 2** : O King of all nations, Jesus Christ, only joy of every heart, come and save your people.

**Week 3** : O Key of David, Jesus Christ, the gates of heaven open at Your command, come & set your people free.

**Week 4** : O Wisdom, holy Word of God, Jesus Christ, all things are in your hands, come & show us the way to salvation.



## Advent in the Liturgical Year



*It is fundamental to the Liturgy that we “remember-and-make-present” The Liturgy is never simply the commemoration of past events or even simply the expectation of the future. It is very firmly anchored in the present moment. Every season and feast of the liturgy is linked to the salvation of Christ given to us here and now. When the Church celebrates the mystery of Christ, there is a word that marks her prayer: “Today!” a word echoing the prayer her Lord taught her and the call of the Holy Spirit. This “today” of the living God which man is called to enter is the “hour” of Jesus’ Passover, which reaches across and underlies all history:*

*Life extends over all beings and fills them with unlimited light; the Orient of orients pervades the universe, and He who was “before the daystar” and before heavenly bodies, immortal and vast, the great Christ, shines over all beings more brightly than the sun. Therefore day of long, eternal light is ushered in for us who believe in him, day which is never blotted out: the mystical Passover. (CCC 1165 - Catechism of the Catholic Church 1165)*

*Another principle underlies our use of the scriptures. There is an old saying that the new lies hidden in the old and the old is made manifest in the new (novum in vetere latet, vetus in novo patet).*

*It is on this harmony of the two Testaments that the Pascal catechesis of the Lord is built, and then, that of the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. This catechesis unveils what lay hidden under the letter of the Old Testament: the mystery of Christ. It is called “typological” because it reveals the newness of Christ on the basis of the “figures” (types) which announce Him in the deeds, words, and symbols of the first covenant. By this re-reading in the Spirit of Truth, starting from Christ, the figures are unveiled. (CCC 1094)*

*So when we read the scriptures, it is so that Christ can shed light on them and bring them to life today. For this reason, the Church, especially during Advent and Lent and above all at the Easter Vigil, re-reads and relives the great events of salvation history in the “today” of her liturgy. But this also demands that catechesis help the faithful to open themselves to this spiritual understanding of the economy of salvation as the Church’s liturgy reveals it and enables us to live it. (CCC 1095)*

*This is particularly applied to Advent - When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for His second coming. By celebrating the Precursor’s birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (CCC 524)*

## Mass



*The Mass is our principle act of worship. In many respects it is the same every day. However, it is adapted to our human needs and today more than ever, we have a rich variety of texts put before us in a way that is designed to aid our spiritual journey. If we are aware of how each day’s prayers and readings fit in with the themes of Advent, the daily Mass or Sunday Masses during this time can carry us along on a themed retreat in preparation for Christmas.*

## Penance

*Advent is a very good time to make use of the sacrament so that we can enter fully into the spirit of St John the Baptist’s call to conversion. By confessing our sins and receiving the forgiveness of Christ, we enter into the process of calling and conversion that the disciples were given at the beginning of the public ministry of Christ.*

## Communion

*The liturgy is never simply a drama. In Advent, we are fully conscious that Christ has come in the flesh. Our participation in the expectation of His second coming is a spiritual sharing here and now in the gift of Christ to the Church of his presence among us. By receiving Him in Holy Communion, we share in His body and blood in expectation of sharing in His presence face to face in heaven.*

## Prayer

*Our private prayers can be focused on the themes of Advent. It is good to adapt our prayers at this time to the themes of conversion, of preparation for the birth of Christ and of celebration of His presence among us. Any of our prayers can be adapted in this way. We can think of these things as we say the Rosary, as we sit quietly in the presence of Christ, or as we take up the readings for Mass and ponder them in the presence of God.*

## Charity

*Christ does not leave us the same. The purpose of His giving us grace is to change our hearts and make us more like Him. The acid test of this is to be found in our daily lives and the manner in which we respond to His call. Christmas and its preparation give us plenty of opportunity for practical charity among our families, friends and neighbours, most of all in our attitudes to them. We do not ever manage this perfectly and so it is good that we have an opportunity to reflect on this calling every year.*

