

## **The Catholic Symbolism in The Advent Wreath**

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Hi friends. My name is Olivia Spears and I am so excited to be with you today, to talk all about the deep meaning of the Advent wreath. This beautiful Catholic tradition is meant to shape our souls during the Advent season. And so I'd love to pray with you now and invite the Holy Spirit to begin that shaping.

### **Opening Prayer**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Lord, you are the light of the world and we love you. Jesus as we contemplate the beautiful Advent wreath today, we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit to just maybe help something stick out to us in today's reflection. What do you want us to particularly pay attention to? Lord, where do you want us to spend more time with you in prayer? Lord, we thank you for your church that gives us so many tangible realities to point us to the supernatural. Thank you for loving us and thank you for coming to save us. We ask all these things through the intercession of your blessed Mother. Amen. In the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **The Tradition of The Advent Wreath**

Well, friends, like I said, I'm just thrilled to talk to you about this beautiful tradition of the Advent wreath. One of the things I love most about the Catholic Church is that she pays attention. She looks around at the created world and knows that the creator has left his fingerprints all over it. And so she often uses these tangible realities, things that we can see and hear and touch and smell to point us to the unseen, supernatural, even greater realities of who God is and His good plan for our lives. And the Advent wreath is one such thing, one such tradition that has been around at least since the early 1600s if not before. And so this Advent wreath, setting it out, lighting the candles is meant to point us, the faithful, to something greater during this Advent season. Now, the Advent wreath is something that maybe many of us are very familiar with, and because of that, we can be tempted to just kind of forget about it or not really reflect on it. And maybe it just becomes another decoration that we put out at the holidays.

But in reality, it has such incredible symbolism that again, is not meant to just stay on our table or by our heart, but it's meant to lift our minds and hearts to the mysteries that we're celebrating throughout Advent and then the Christmas season. And so today, as we deep dive these meanings and symbolism, my hope is that we would just be able to have a refreshed understanding of the Advent wreath and that it would assist your prayer during the Advent season. So that once again, what we can see leads us to consider what we cannot see, what we can light leads us to think about He who is light, which we'll get to talk more about.

## **Evergreen Branches**

So let's start by talking about the wreath itself. There is even symbolism in the wreath itself. So typically Advent wreath's are made from evergreen branches and evergreen trees, as we know, stay green and maintain their leaves all year long, as opposed to deciduous trees that drop their leaves. And so these evergreen trees automatically are a sign to us as Christians of the eternal everlasting life in Christ Jesus. So when you think about evergreen trees being bright and lively, even in the harshest, deepest winters, so too it can be with our souls. If you've ever seen like a snow scape or a winter landscape, then you know what I'm talking about. Amidst the white snow and the quiet, when everything else is dead or buried under a blanket of snow, these evergreen trees almost seem to pop even more. And, that's what grace offers us, is that even in the darkest, harshest winters of our own life, we're not dead and buried. Our souls are alive because of Jesus and because of what he has done for us. And so we too can pop, we can shine forth with the life of Christ just as the evergreen trees do.

Okay the circle of the wreath, even the shape itself, points us to the reality of who God is. The circular wreath as a circle has no beginning and no end just as God is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. He is the eternal God. And Jesus is the eternal son, begotten of the Father. He is the eternal word that entered into our human space and time in order to bring us to Himself that we might have eternal unending life with Him in heaven. So as we look at the circular shape of the wreath, we can be reminded of our ultimate destiny. Right now, right here is not what we're living for. Our home is in heaven. And so even as God comes down to us, we are reminded by the Advent wreath that our ultimate destination is to go up and home to Him. All right, so let's talk about light.

## **The Advent Candles**

We light candles on the Advent wreath. This is a favorite pastime for my children during Advent. They love lighting the candles on the Advent wreath. And I think this childlike wonder teaches us something too about light. So light and darkness are two huge themes in the Christian life that have been around since the beginning. When God created the world, what is the first thing he said? Let there be light. Let there be light. And he separated the light from the darkness. And so right away we get to see that where God's word is there is light. So where the word of God, Jesus is, there is light. And the candles that we light at Advent are meant to remind us of the light of the world.

Now here's the cool thing. So Jesus, the light of the world dispels the darkness of sin and death in our own hearts. And so we get to contemplate this as the Advent season goes on. Advent is a penitential season and sometimes we forget that because we really think of lent as a large season of penance as it is. But Advent is also a penitential season, where we are called to make room in our hearts and lives for more prayer, fasting and alms giving. And so that's what we do during Advent. We make our Advent resolutions. We commit to more prayer. We mortify our flesh by fasting and giving alms.

We turn away from sin so that more of Jesus can dwell in our hearts. And so what's neat is that as we light each candle every week of Advent, the light increases, the darkness is dispelled more. And may it be in our souls too, that as we travel through Advent, more and more of the light of Christ lights up our soul, that to dispel the darkness of our own sin and

earthly attachments. And so as we do our prayer and fasting and alms giving, and as we turn more to Jesus and invite Him every day to be the light in our life and the light of our souls, just like the Advent wreath has greater and growing light, hopefully our souls will have greater and growing light too.

### **The First Purple Candle**

Okay, so let's talk about the candles themselves. First up, we have the purple candle that we light on the first Sunday of Advent, and this candle represents hope. So right off the bat, holy Mother Church gives us our focus for this season, which is hope. Hope is a paramount theme in the Advent season because it is a paramount theme in the life of the Christian. So the Israelites waited years and years in hope for the coming of the Messiah. And now we await His return and our return to Him in heaven. And we are called to hope.

So hope in this season is a beautiful thing to reflect on because this is not a hope that is just like a positive attitude or well wishes. No hope is a theological virtue, which means it comes from the Lord Himself. We cannot create it on our own accord, but through the sanctifying grace that we receive in baptism and that we cultivate through the sacramental life and through our life of prayer and the works of mercy, we're able to receive more of Christ's hope in our heart. And this is a hope that helps us stay evergreen. This is the hope that even through the darkest seasons when everything seems lost, when it seems like, Lord, are you going to show up for me. We know that God keeps His promises and we know that God is with us. So we have this hope through the Advent season and we light this as a reminder that as Christians, there is nothing that has to still our hope. That we get to wake up every morning and say, Jesus, I trust in you and I'm going to clinging to hope in you because this is not on my shoulders, it's on yours, and you have already saved me.

And so I'm going to choose to walk in your way and walk in your light. And so I just invite you, as you light this first Advent candle through the season, and you'll be lighting it a lot throughout the four weeks of Advent. Every time you light that first candle, think about where you might need hope in your life. What feels dead? Where are you tempted to kind of write off and say, this is never going to get better. And as you do, maybe pray a prayer like Jesus, I place my hope in you. Lord, I surrender everything to you. Jesus, you know those areas where I have to fight for hope and I invite you into those areas to help me. I trust you and I love you. Amen. Just a simple prayer like that can help reorient our hearts from seeing just may what feel heavy or lifeless in our life can take on new life thanks to the grace of Christ. And that's what this first Advent candle reminds us to always, always keep that fire of hope kindling in our hearts.

### **The Second Purple Candle**

Okay. The second Advent candle we light on the second Sunday of Advent, it is also purple. And this represents peace. Now, don't we all want peace so badly? We want peace in our own hearts. We want peace in our relationships, we want peace in our families, we want peace in the world. And often the evidence is so contrary to that peace. But here's where we get to live counter culturally as Christians because the peace of Christ is promised to us no matter what. Jesus is called the prince of peace. And so we get to believe that He is. Now like hope, peace is something that we can't necessarily manufacture on our own. Father Jacques Philippe says

that true peace does not come as a result of the process of human reasoning. It can only come from having our hearts attached to the promises God makes us through His word. So maybe you're like me and maybe you try to achieve peace through your human reasoning all the time. Is it just me? Probably not. Because I think this is a very human thing. How often do I try to calm my anxieties or fears or worries through working it out myself as if peace is a puzzle and I just have to figure out how to put all the pieces together and then I can exhale and feel some semblance of safety. This is not the peace that Christ promises us. Now, I'm not negating the good practices of being able to coach ourselves or to capture our thoughts as scripture says and to tame those. But at the end of the day, the deep peace for which I long and you do too, cannot come from anything that I can work out by my human reasoning. I just have to receive it. And where does my peace come from? Knowing that the Lord is with me in it. That He truly is Emmanuel God with us and that He is with me in all these situations that don't feel peaceful and that do feel anxious.

Now, this is our challenge, brothers and sisters, because it requires a vulnerability and a surrender to not rely on our own peacemaking abilities. But if I want peace in my relationships and families, and if I want peace in the world, it has to start with peace in my heart. And that only comes from my union with Christ. So as we light the second Advent candle that reminds us of peace, let us return our hearts to Jesus. It's a reminder to return our gaze to the one who is our peace. So as we light the second Advent candle, we may pray something like Jesus, you are the prince of peace. And Lord, before I turn to any problem solving or solutions, I reunite my heart to yours. Jesus, I invite you into these places because where you are there is peace. And I don't want to try to problem solve or find solutions apart from you. I want to operate from a place of peace in your heart. No matter what else is going on around me. Help me Jesus. Amen.

## **The Pink Candle**

Okay, the third Advent candle. This one is the different one. This one we get to light on the third Sunday of Advent. It's the rose candle or pink, and we light it on Gaudete Sunday. Now, Gaudete is Latin for rejoice, and that is what this candle symbolizes, joy. And so I love the wisdom of Holy Mother Church in this because she really is a mother to us. At this point, we're halfway through Advent, we're halfway through our penitential season, and we might be feeling tired, we might be feeling done. And so we have Gaudete Sunday and the candle that represents joy as a way to say, keep going, don't give up. You're almost there. And so we're encouraged by the fact that we already know how Advent ends. We already know what comes at the end of our waiting. It is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is everything that we long for. It's the fulfillment of all our desires. And so we get to take a pause and to celebrate during this joyful season.

Now, joy, like peace and hope does not come from ourselves. This is more than just like in earthly happiness that we may, you know very well and beautifully experience from a sunset or like sharing a dessert with our best friend. These are good things, but the lasting joy that we're talking about is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. He has to be the one that bears joy in our hearts. And so when we allow the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts and we water that seed of the Holy Spirit through our daily prayer, through our Advent sacrifices and alms giving, then joy can be born more and more in our hearts. And this is a joy that is not dictated by what our life circumstances look like. And this is what we see in the lives of the saints. And honestly, you probably see it in some lives of the people that you know who walk with the Lord. You

see how they live a supernatural joy even in the face of the greatest crosses. This, friends, does not come from our own striving. It comes from the life of God in us. And so that's what we're reminded of this Gaudete Sunday and as we light the third Advent candle. This is also a great time to kind of reexamine how we're doing with our Advent resolutions. Maybe we've kind of strayed from those and sought our joy in the things of the world. So this is a great time to pause and renew those resolutions, knowing that we're only going to find our joy and our fulfillment in Jesus. So as you light the third Advent candle, consider those areas that may need joy in your life. Now, this may require some deeper digging because you may dig and your answer to that question may be everything and everywhere. I feel no joy, everything feels hopeless.

And so I just invite you to stay in those places and to invite Jesus, the joy of the world into those places, because when you do, He gives you hope and peace and joy. So be honest with him there. Be honest with Him in those places. And I do promise you that when you invite Him there, you will see a change. You will see his light come forth and start to dispel some of that darkness.

So as you light that third Advent candle, especially if joy is something that you're struggling with right now, you may pray a prayer like Jesus, joy of man's desiring, renew my joy in you today. Lord, you see where I struggle to live your joy, you see the heavy crosses that threaten to crush me. And so Jesus, I just invite you here to be right by my side to bear those burdens with hope and confidence that you are with me and that you will never leave me and that you will see me through. I cannot do it on my own, Lord, but I want to radiate with your joy. Help me Jesus. Amen.

## **The Fourth And Final Candle**

Okay, so then we get to the fourth and final Advent candle. We light this on the fourth Sunday of Advent. It is a purple candle and it represents love. And love is the whole point. So whether we have just a couple of days of that fourth week of Advent or an entire week, we get to contemplate love. Love himself came for us at Christmas and we get to live with love himself all of the days of our life. And this is the whole point. This is the whole point of the Christian life. This is what we strive for. And so especially I think love is a good theme for us this last week of Advent because we are likely at this time preparing to celebrate Christmas with friends or family. And that may bring with it some challenges or tensions or old wounds, things like that. And so what better thing to meditate on during this last week of Advent, than the love of God that is born in our hearts and is meant to overflow into love of neighbor.

So as we prepare for Christmas this last week of Advent. As we do our cooking and cleaning and packing and traveling and hosting and chatting, may love be ever on our minds. Again, this is something that we cannot do apart from the Lord. We cannot love with a supernatural love without the grace of God in our hearts. But it is what is given to us at Christmas. It is the great gift of this season, and we get to choose to accept it. And when we accept the love of Jesus in our own hearts, we start to see with His vision. And so maybe the people that are difficult for us or the situations that really sting, we can start to see it with a new vision.

We can see these people may be a little bit more the way God sees them, and that increases the love, the true charity in our hearts. And so as we light that fourth Advent candle, we may pray something like,

Lord Jesus, you are the love of my life. Lord, I don't know how to love well. I need you to teach me. And I know that is why you came to be our model of holiness. So Lord, help me love, fill my heart with so much of your love that it can't help but overflow onto everyone that I'll interact with this week. Everyone from the supermarket, to the post office, to the people I'll share a roof with. Lord, I want everything that I do to point back to you. So would you help me Lord? I love you. Amen.

So friends, I hope this has helped you see how deep and beautiful the meaning and symbolism of the Advent wreath are. The Advent wreath is a great joy to participate in during Advent. It's a gift to our souls that we get to share it with ourselves our families, and we get to enjoy the increasing light of Christ as we prepare for His coming at Christmas. I hope this blesses your time this Advent, and I thank you for your attention and I'm so glad to have gotten a chance to pray with you. God bless you.