

Light our way to the treasures of Christmas

One of the nicest things about an Advent wreath is there isn't a single right way to do it. Maybe you find it easier to light the candles at breakfast than dinner. Perhaps your family likes to recite the 0 Antiphons while another reads parts of Scripture and yet another recites the Rosary. Maybe you put the wreath before the Nativity scene while others keep it on the dining room table. To use a slang expression, "it's all good".

As you prepare your Advent wreath, consider focusing on the candles themselves. We all know that the candle for the third Sunday of Advent represents joy; even its pink color sets it apart from the somber purple of the others. But each of the four candles symbolizes a virtue awaiting us during this season of anticipation and longing. As we wait for the birth of Our Savior, let the four candles of the Advent wreath light your way to the true treasures of the Christmas season.

Week One – Hope:

Sometimes we think of hope as wishful thinking. The virtue of hope is much more than wishing upon a spiritual star, even the Star of Bethlehem. It is an optimistic expectancy that allows us to have confidence that God is with us in all things. As you light the first candle of Advent, ask each family member what they are hoping for. If the hope is more of a wish (I hope I get a new American Girl doll), take time to explain the difference between wishing for material possessions and hoping for the great gifts that only God can give us – like peace, wisdom and forgiveness.

Week Two – Peace:

As we await the coming of the Prince of Peace, use this week

to make peace in your own life. Is there a family member with whom you've had a disagreement? A co-worker you don't get along with? Make an effort to mend the rift between the two of you and, if your approach meets with rebuff, forgive that person anyway. When you light this week's candle, pray the Peace Prayer attributed to St. Francis that begins: "Make me an instrument of your peace..."

Week Three – Joy:

Christmas has almost become synonymous with stress for many families. The crush of shopping, cooking, relatives, parties, school events and all the rest can rob the season of its pleasure. This Sunday – Gaudete, or Joy, Sunday – we are reminded that joy doesn't come from what we do, but from who we love. Set aside some time this week to do at least one thing with those you love just for the sheer joy of it. Look at the Christmas lights. Watch a favorite movie. Make a batch of decadent cookies. Listen to carols. Whatever it is, do it as a family and simply enjoy your time together.

Week Four – Love:

"I love you." On the last Sunday of Advent, we are reminded that with the Incarnation, love became a person. While actions may speak louder than words, it's always good to say the actual words out loud now and then. As you light the final candle, share some sign of love and peace with your family members – including saying the actual words out loud.

A prayer for the blessing of the Advent wreath can be found [here](#).