

ADVENT WREATH

It's exciting to have someone special come visit, isn't it? You clean the house, make special meals, and maybe even count the days! Well, that's what Advent is all about. The word *advent* means "to come," and it refers to Jesus' coming to earth as a baby on Christmas Day. The season of Advent is all about looking forward to celebrating the day when our almighty God stepped into history as a human being.

In days past, Christians would prepare their hearts to celebrate the arrival of God's Son by tidying their lives up a bit. They would remember the poor and perhaps even fast. They understood that when the holiday festivities began there would be plenty of time for enjoying delicious food and exchanging gifts. But it was important to begin the reception by focusing on the reason for the party.

Of course, this is also a good time to look inside ourselves and see if there is anything that needs a little cleaning up as we anticipate the arrival of Jesus' second coming.

One of the ways we can join in the celebration is with an Advent wreath. This circle of evergreen boughs reminds us of God's forever love, a love that has no beginning and no end. Four candles—three purple and one pink—stand amid the greenery. A white candle stands in the center.

The first purple candle is called Prophecy, or the Hope candle; it invites us to thank God for the hope we have in Jesus, the prophesied Messiah. The second purple candle is called Bethlehem, or Peace. In Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace was born so that we sinners could be at peace with our holy God.

The pink Shepherd's candle, or Joy, celebrates the good tidings of great joy that is for all people: Christ is born! The final purple candle is called Angel, or Love. Joining with the heavenly hosts that first Christmas night, we say, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14, KJV).

Love has entered our world through the birth of Jesus, represented by the white Christ candle. The baby came to die on a cross as punishment for our sins. That's amazing love! Something indeed worth taking four weeks to think about.

