

From the Deacon's Wife

This year, Advent will begin on Sunday, November 29th. It is a time of hopeful anticipation as we long for the birth of the Christ Child on Christmas. Waiting is something that is especially hard for young children. Fortunately there are many ways to make this time of waiting meaningful for children. Making a chain out of construction paper strips, and cutting off one each day to see how many more days to Christmas is a common ritual for children. The practice of using an Advent wreath is one that can also help explain the season and its true meaning to your children. Symbols are a language children (and adults) understand very easily, so it can help them grasp the meaning of Advent time.

Do you have an Advent wreath? You can make one, and have the kids participate in creating the wreath, by using coat hangers or an old floral wreath – anything that can serve as the circle to be covered with real or artificial evergreen branches. The wreath can be set on the dining table and candles set inside the ring or it can be hung from the ceiling or sturdy light fixture over the table. If hung, you will need to be sure there is a crosspiece to support the four candles or the wreath is strong enough to hold the candles. When I was little, Dad always cut fresh evergreen from the yard for our wreath, which hung above the table. Unfortunately, by about the third week of Advent, needles were dropping into our food each night. Dry evergreen is also a fire hazard, so I would highly recommend going with artificial greenery. You can also purchase Advent wreaths in several price ranges at Gloria Deo (13065 West Center Road) or Cosgrave Church Goods (8222 H Street).

Explain to your children that the green wreath symbolizes the eternity and never-endingness, never-changingness of God. The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent, three purple candles for penance to renew our hearts in anticipation of Christ's birth. The one rose colored candle is for the third week of Advent or Gaudete (rejoice) Sunday, when we celebrate that we are more than half way through our time of waiting and longing! Each day as we light the candle(s) of the wreath, we are reminded that Christ is the light of the world and the closer we get to Christmas – His birth – the brighter the light shines.

The father or head of the household should bless the wreath (which is a sacramental) with holy water and the words of blessing (see Prayers for the Advent Wreath) before its first use, and all will say the prayers for each week of Advent along with the Grace before Meals prayer at each family meal. Tradition is that the youngest child lights the candle during the first week (the purple candle opposite the rose candle) after the prayers before the evening meal. Other children (or those too young to be trusted with candle lighting) can take turns blowing out the candle at the end of the evening meal. The oldest child lights two candles the second week. The mother lights the candles during the third week, and Dad does the lighting the fourth week.

Some traditional Prayers for the Advent Wreath are on the next page. The advantage is that one person reads the prayer and everyone responds "Amen" – very simple. You can find a more contemporary version that is more participatory, in the special Advent insert, along with other ideas for Advent activities the family can do together.

If you have any questions or topics you would like to see addressed in future columns, please contact me by phone at 319-8730, or by e-mail at kevinjoyce@holynameomaha.org.

From the Deacon's Wife Prayers for the Advent Wreath

Blessing of the Advent Wreath

Father: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: **Who hath made heaven and earth.**

Father: Let us pray. O God, by Whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth Thy blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from Thee abundant graces, through Christ Our Lord.

All: **Amen.** [*Sprinkle wreath with holy water.*]

First Week of Advent

Leader: O Lord, stir up Thy power, we beg Thee and come that by Thy protection we may deserve to be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins and be saved by Thy deliverance through Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**

Second Week of Advent

Leader: O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare the ways of Thine only begotten Son, that through His coming we may be made worthy to serve Thee with pure minds, through Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**

Third Week of Advent

Leader: O Lord, we beseech Thee, incline Thine ear to our prayers and enlighten the darkness of our minds by the grace of Thy visitation, through Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**

Fourth Week of Advent

Leader: O Lord, we beseech Thee, stir up Thy power and come; and with great might deliver us, that with the help of Thy grace, Thy merciful forgiveness may hasten what our sins impede, through Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**