

Advent Candle Prayers

Note

The idea of having a wreath containing candles in Advent is a custom coming from German Lutheran Christians. Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808-1881) was a pastor in Germany. Children in his mission school would daily ask him if Christmas had come and so, in 1839, he took a large ring from an old cartwheel, decorated it with 24 small candles and four large white ones. He lit each small candle on each weekday and Saturday in Advent and the larger candles on each Sunday so the children could see the days being counted off. The custom became popular evolving into the wreaths we see now with just the four Sunday candles. Roman Catholics began to adapt the custom in the 1920s and in the 1930s it spread to North America.

Those charged with looking after the candles know to have a few spare as the first candle burns more than the others and can burn dangerously low if there's holly involved. One tip is to keep the candles in the freezer until just before each Sunday service – they take much longer to burn if they are frozen.

The prayers that follow reflect the Old Testament reading for each of the Sundays of Advent and for the midnight Christmas service. The final prayer would also work on Christmas Day morning. They can be freely used, adapted, and quoted.

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Advent 1

O Most High,
tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains quake in Your presence,
Your name be made known,
and all tremble at Your coming!
May this candle remind us to keep watch for You,
as You appear like a light in the gloom, a flame in the wind,
and we may be, for You, clay in Your hands.
All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your anointed One,
our approaching Liberator,
through the power of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever, Amen.

Advent 2

O Most High,
speak tenderly to us and bring Your comfort,
reveal Your glory in the midst of our trauma,
feed us as a shepherd feeds hungry sheep,
and carry us as a ewe carries her lambs.
May our lives, like these candles, enlighten the gloom,
that we may be Your messengers,
preparing the way in the wilderness of our world,
spreading Your light, love, and liberation.
All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your anointed One,
our approaching Deliverer,
through the power of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever, Amen.

Advent 3

O Most High,
anoint us with Your Spirit,
that we may bring good news to the oppressed,
bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to captives,
release to the imprisoned, and announce both Your favour and Your justice.
As we light these candles bring Your comfort to those who mourn,
give us the oil of gladness and make us oaks of righteousness in Your sight.
All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your anointed One,
our approaching Emancipator,
through the power of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever, Amen.

Advent 4

O Most High,
You are content to tabernacle with humanity,
joining us in our journeys through life's wilderness,
and not be confined in wood or stone.
As we light these candles, give us rest from our enemies,
and the grace to say "yes" to You.
All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your anointed One,
our approaching Saviour,
through the power of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever, Amen.

Christmas Eve/Day

O Most High,
we have long lived in darkness and deep shadow,
but on this night/day your light shines upon us.
You have increased our joy,
freed us from all that oppresses us, and given us a sign of peace.
As we light these candles,
remind us of Jesus, the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace,
in whom there is true good news.
All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your anointed One,
the child in the manger,
through the power of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever, Amen.