

Advent Wreath History

The Advent wreath—four equidistant candles forming a cross of light in a circle of evergreen—emerged in the fifteenth century alongside its more popular cousin, the Christmas Tree. Both are Germanic customs which spread through immigration to the British Isles and the United States.

The older Advent wreaths could be quite large and even suspended from the ceiling. Reminiscent of British “kissing boughs,” they were large, bowl-shaped frames of greenery hung with ribbons and decorated with gilded fruits.

The circular shape is symbolic of eternity and a reminder of one of Advents central lessons: the reminder that the “eternal” breaks into regular time as evidenced by the birth of a child of light in the middle of winter and the cultivation of one’s own inner light of deepest wisdom.*

Tips for Entering Into the Season

- 🕒 On the first Sunday of Advent, Dec 2, extinguish all the lights in your house at dusk and gather around the wreath. The youngest child lights the first candle (with help of course.) Use the accompanying Green Advent meditation as a guide, lighting one additional candle each week until Christmas Eve.
- 🕒 Tell the Nativity story— either from memory or using scripture as a guide. It is found in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. (See Resource Guide for other options.) In whatever way you can, digest and retell the story. It is most compelling as an oral tradition. Children, who have themselves recently come from mystery, intuitively understand the deeper resonances of the tale and hear themselves in it.
- 🕒 In addition to the wreath, break the season into smaller pieces by celebrating special minor feasts of Advent:

St. Nicholas of Holland (annually on Dec 6).

The predecessor of Santa Claus, St. Nicholas was an early Christian saint and the Bishop of Myra in Turkey in the late 3rd and 4th century. Famous for his generosity, St. Nicholas saved the three daughters of an impoverished nobleman from being sold into slavery by throwing bags of gold through their window on three consecutive nights, some of which landed in stockings hung up to dry. He also made small toys and clothing for poor children. (www.stnicholascenter.org).

Hang stockings the night before and stuff them with a simple wooden toy, coins, and clothing. Cook up a Mediterranean feast, tell the story of St. Nick & make simple crafts.

St. Lucia (annually on Dec 13).

Lucia was a fourth century Italian. Her name contains the Latin root lux or “light.” For centuries, the youngest girl in Scandinavian families has impersonated Lucia and the solstice sun by wearing a crown of candles and going from room to room in her home to wake the family from a deep midwinter sleep.

Get up early, send the youngest daughter around in a crown of electric candles, eat in bed, and serve St. Lucia Buns with real saffron (or yellow food coloring).

Winter Solstice. (This year solstice is on Dec 21).

The Winter Solstice marks the longest night before the days once again begin to lengthen. It is a gathering point for ancient traditions of gratitude for warmth and plenty in a season of scarcity – such as adorning the home with evergreen boughs and glittery decorations—believed to encourage the Sun to shine more brightly.

Join us on Friday Dec 14th 5:30-7PM for a solstice mobile family workshop. Other traditions include burning a Yule log—to say goodbye to the lunar year, and putting out birdseed.

About the Liturgical Calendar.

The liturgical calendar is an ancient calendar of feasts and fasts which allows us to connect daily rhythms with timeless themes: life, death, renewal, joy, sorrow & growth. While rooted in the Christian tradition, the liturgical calendar is a resource open for everyone. It is best understood as a poetry we can get inside and live which supports individuals and families in creating a vibrant home and family culture.

About the Instructor

I am a holistic coach and retreat leader at Bird in Hand. I support clients in finding balance and joy and especially enjoy working with people engaged in startup ventures-- whether that be raising a family or living into a new professional role. I also help people craft life-giving home traditions: one tool for staying centered amidst the busyness of life.

My background

My work is at the intersection of spirituality and the social sphere. In 2008 I graduated with dual Masters from Harvard Divinity and Kennedy Schools. While I enjoyed the opportunity to study in a rigorous academic context, I also found the experience depleting as it cultivated one faculty (the intellect) at the expense of the others. Now I aim in both personal and professional roles to integrate the mind, body and spirit.

I am also a mom of three young children, Coleman (6), Perl (4) and Rosetta (2) and partner to Richard Amory. I consider my children to be my greatest spiritual teachers and I love helping parents and children find simple activities to do together which bring beauty and comfort into everyday life. For more info about my services please visit www.courtneypinkerton.com

* I am indebted to *Holidays and Holy Nights* by Chris Hill (2003) for history and other details shared here.