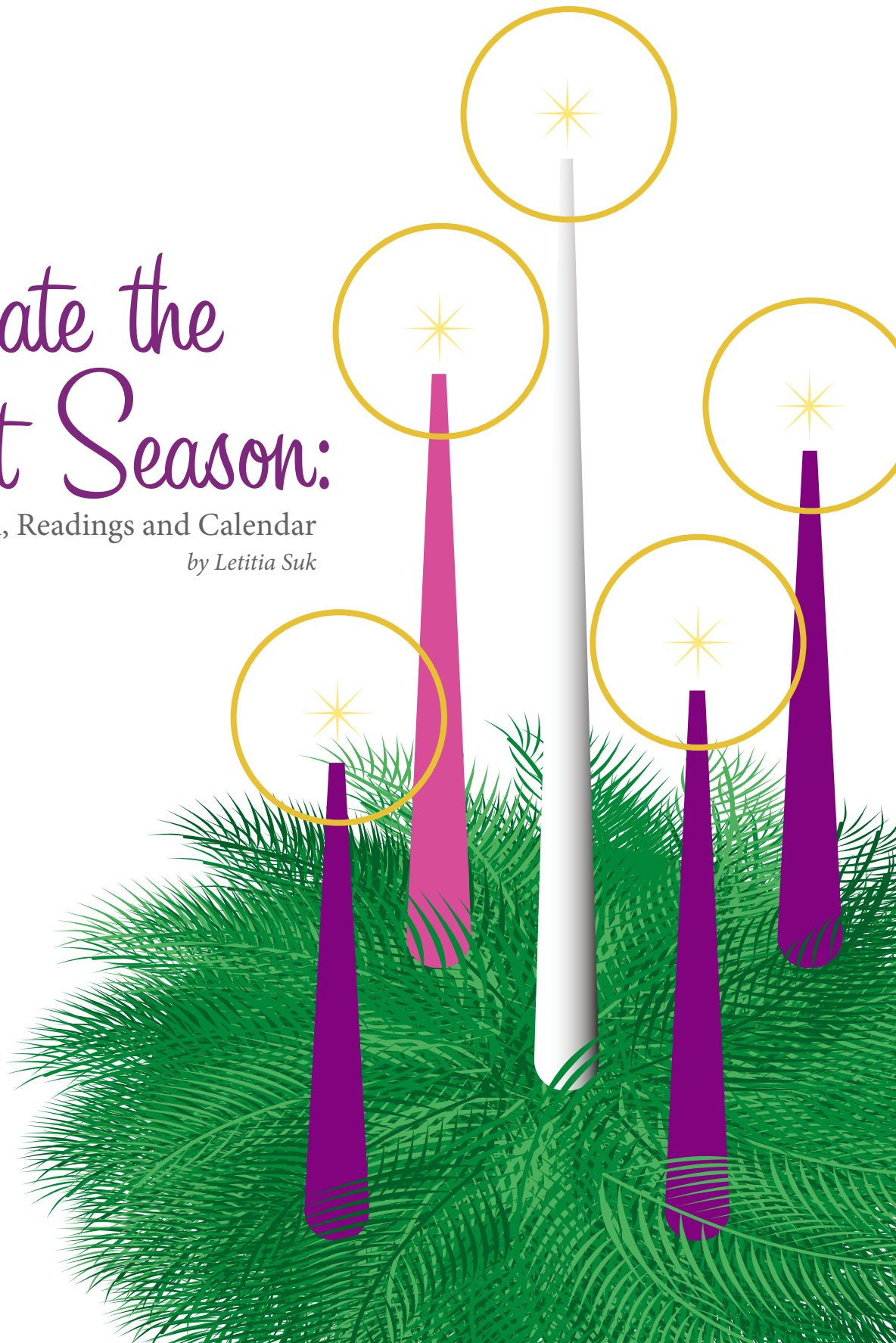


Celebrate the Advent Season:

The Candles, Wreath, Readings and Calendar

by Letitia Suk



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Three weeks and two days before Christmas and the heated discussion among my four children is not about which video games they want for Christmas but whose turn it is to light the candle at family Advent. It's the first week of Advent season, the observance of the four weeks preceding Christmas, a tradition started in the Middle Ages. My kids want to make sure they each have a part in the celebration.

Advent readings

The length of the Advent season depends on which day of the week Christmas falls on. This schedule includes all possible 28 days of Advent. For shorter seasons adjust this schedule by doubling up on some readings or eliminating the final two readings, which record events after Christ's birth.

First Week

Sun. Is. 40:1-5
Mon. Is. 52:7-10
Tue. Is. 40:9-11
Wed. Gen. 3:8-15
Thu. Gen. 15:1-6
Fri. Dt. 18:15-19
Sat. Ps. 89:1-4

Third Week

Sun. Lk. 1:5-13
Mon. Lk. 1:14-17
Tue. Lk. 1:18-25
Wed. Lk. 1:39-45
Thu. Lk. 1:46-56
Fri. Lk. 1:57-66
Sat. Lk. 1:67-80

Second Week

Sun. Is. 11:1-10
Mon. Zech. 6:12-13
Tue. Mic. 5:2-4
Wed. Mal. 3:1-6
Thu. Jn 1:1-8
Fri. Jn 1:9-18
Sat. Mk. 1:1-3

Fourth Week

Sun. Is. 7:10-14
Mon. Lk. 1:26-35
Tue. Is. 9:2-7
Wed. Mt. 1:18-25
Thu. Lk. 2:1-20
Fri. Mt. 2:1-2
Sat. Lk. 2:21-35

More than any other activity, Advent can restore Jesus to the center of the Christmas celebration, because on each Advent day the birth of Jesus is read, sung and talked about. The whole family can participate and find the observance meaningful. The props are simple and inexpensive. The memories and training will last a lifetime. Although the common tenets of observing

Advent are shared by many churches, each family can add its own flavor. Following is a basic primer on how to start celebrating Advent this year.

When: Advent starts on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Because Christmas falls on different days each year, Advent can last 22 to 28 days.

Prepare your family: Let your family or household know that this year you are going to start a new tradition to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Whenever you can with children, refer to Christmas as Jesus' birthday. Decide which time of the day will work best for your Advent time.

What you need:

- An Advent wreath, which can be purchased at most Christian bookstores, or made of fire-safe materials or a log with holes for candles. Perhaps it could be a family event to choose or make the Advent wreath.
- Four candles, three purple and one rose, and an additional white candle for Christmas Eve. A box of four Advent candles can be purchased at many card stores or Christian bookstores.
- A Bible for readings and, for younger children, a selection of children's Christmas stories that focus on the birth of Jesus.
- Advent readings.

Optional items:

- An Advent calendar, available where cards are sold, with 24 windows to open each day in December or a paper chain of 24 red and green links to mark the number of days until Jesus' birthday. (A free Advent calendar is also available [here](#).)
- Christmas carol books

Beginning the celebration: On the first day begin with either a prayer or a Christmas carol. Light the first purple candle, known as the prophecy candle. The liturgical color purple is a sign of penance and longing as we wait for the birth of Jesus. With the lighting, talk about Jesus being the light of the world. Read the Advent Scripture of the day. Conclude by singing or praying. Have one child blow out the candle.

Light the same candle each day of the first week. Follow with the reading, Christmas carols or other meaningful activities. On the second Sunday light two purple candles, both of which are relit each night. The second candle is known as the Bethlehem candle.

The third week light the two purple candles and then a rose candle, or shepherd candle. Rose is a sign of joy and hope that He is coming.

Light the last candle, known as the angel candle, on the fourth Sunday. All four candles are lit each night that week to symbolize the growing brightness of Jesus' coming.

Advent activities for Christmas Eve: Conclude the Advent season by lighting all four candles and placing an additional white candle in the center in its own holder. Have a birthday party for Jesus complete with cake, the Happy Birthday song, candles and presents of nonmaterial gifts such as singing, readings, a play and prayers that each family member brings to share with others. Consider doing a Nativity play with simple costumes. As you prepare to open gifts explain how we give gifts as a reminder of how much God gave us in Jesus.

Long after the new toys are banished to the back of the closet and the decorations stored away for another year, the memories of the four weeks of Advent will remain. Don't be surprised if it turns out to be your favorite tradition!

Additional Advent activities

- As Christmas cards arrive, save them with the Advent wreath and use your Advent prayer time to pray for the senders.
- Do an Advent service project for the needy. Collect money or goods and use a portion of the Advent time to decide whom to help and how to do it. Some possibilities are to join a church's gift-giving project, call the Salvation Army for names of families who are needy, send a special food or gift package to a missionary or give anonymously to those you know in need.
- Use your Nativity set with as many animals as possible to enact the story. (Great for younger kids!) Some families set up the manger scene and each day move the people and animals in a little closer.
- Add occasional craft times to the end of an Advent ceremony. Make ornaments using salt dough or glue pictures of family members on flat foam shapes and decorate.
- Make cookies or candies to share at the conclusion of your Advent time, or make special Advent cookies different from Christmas ones.
- Have children bring homemade instruments to enhance the singing.
- If you have competitive children, alternate who will light the candle, pick the carol, lead the prayers and read the Bible.
- Invite your friends to share an Advent evening with you.