

## “Where Did the Advent Wreath Tradition Originate—and Why Do We Light Advent Candles?”

**Clint:** Today we light the second candle of Advent—the candle of **Peace**. In a world that often feels hurried and noisy . . .

**Miriam:** *(interrupting)* . . . why are we doing this?

*Clint looks around the room uncomfortably. After a brief pause, Pastor Wes stands.*

**Pastor Wes:** I think I can help you with that. *(Crossing to Miriam)* You asked, why do we light the Advent candles. That’s a great question! To answer that, I think we should start with where this tradition began. Sound good? *(He sits on the edge of the stage)*

**Miriam:** *(Clint & Miriam sit down with Wes)* Sure!

**Pastor Wes:** Well, the Advent wreath, the way we know it today, actually started in Germany in the 1800s. But the idea of using candles and light goes back *much* further — even before Christianity.

**Miriam:** Really? People used candles before Christmas was even a thing?

**Pastor Wes:** They did! A long time ago, people in northern Europe — places like Germany and Scandinavia — faced very long, dark winters. Around the time of the winter solstice, they would light candles on a wheel and pray to their god of light, asking for the sun to come back and bring warmth and life to the world.

**Miriam:** So the candles were kind of like a way of saying, “Please let the light come back”?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly! Then, when Christian missionaries came to those areas, they didn’t erase that tradition — they gave it new meaning. *(Light of the World begins)* The wheel of fire became a *wreath*, and instead of praying for the sun to return, people used the candles to remember the coming of *Jesus*, the Light of the World.

### **SONG: Light of the World (Sing Hallelujah)**

**Charlotte:** *(sitting with Wes and Miriam)* So who came up with the Advent wreath we use today?

**Pastor Wes:** That’s a great question! The modern Advent wreath — the one most of us know — started with a man named **Johann Hinrich Wichern**. He was a Lutheran pastor in Hamburg, Germany, way back in 1839.

**Charlotte:** Wow, that’s a long time ago! What made him think of it?

**Pastor Wes:** He worked at a place called the *Rauhes Haus*, a mission school where he taught and cared for poor children. As Christmas got closer, the kids kept asking him the same question — “*How long until Christmas?*”

**Miriam:** *(laughs)* I totally get that. I’d ask too!

**Pastor Wes:** Right? So Pastor Wichern came up with a creative idea. He took an old cartwheel and turned it into a big wooden ring. Around it, he placed twenty small red candles for the weekdays and four large white candles for the Sundays of Advent.

**Miriam:** That must’ve been a lot of candles!

**Pastor Wes:** It was! Every day, the children would light one candle — a small one for each weekday and a big one on each Sunday. As the days passed, the light grew brighter and brighter, reminding them that Christmas was getting closer and that hope was growing, too.

**Charlotte:** That sounds really special. Did it look like our wreaths today?

**Pastor Wes:** Not at first. About twenty years later, people started adding evergreen branches around the wooden ring, giving it that green, living look we recognize now. Eventually, the design was simplified to just four or five candles — one for each Sunday, and sometimes a fifth, called the *Christ Candle*, for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

**Charlotte:** And then everyone started using it?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly. The idea spread fast — first through Lutheran churches and families in Germany, then to Roman Catholic churches, and by the 1930s, German immigrants had brought the tradition to North America.

**Miriam:** So that’s how the Advent wreath became a part of Christmas everywhere!

**Pastor Wes:** That’s right. It started with a pastor answering a child’s question — just like yours — and became a beautiful way for all of us to prepare for the coming of Christ.

### **SONG: Prepare Ye (the Way of the Lord)**

**Miriam:** Okay, now that we know where the Advent wreath came from... why do we light the candles?

**Pastor Wes:** Again, great question — that’s really what it’s all about. Lighting Advent candles is a tradition that helps us *get ready* — not just for Christmas Day, but for the coming of Jesus.

**Erin:** *(Joining the group at the edge of the stage)* So it’s kind of like counting down?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly — but not just counting the days. The candles help us prepare our *hearts* too. Each candle we light reminds us that Jesus, the Light of the World, is getting

closer. As the candles grow brighter each week, it's like the world itself is getting ready for His arrival.

**Charlotte:** Oh, that's cool — the light gets stronger the closer we get to Christmas!

**Pastor Wes:** That's right. Each Sunday, we light one more candle. Last week, we lit the Candle of Hope — the first one — reminding us that we can trust in God's promises.

**Erin:** And today we're lighting the second one, right?

**Pastor Wes:** Yes — the Candle of Peace. But this peace isn't just about everyone getting along or things being quiet. It's a deeper kind of peace — the kind that comes from knowing God and being close to Him.

**Erin:** Like a calm on the inside, even when everything else is crazy?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly! The Bible calls Jesus the *Prince of Peace*. (*Peace begins*) Long before He was born, the prophet Isaiah said His peace would never end. And when Jesus was born, the angels said, "*Peace on earth and goodwill to men.*"

#### **SONG: Peace (*The second candle is lit during the song*)**

**Jack:** (*Joining group*) You said this candle is for peace... but the world doesn't really feel peaceful right now.

**Pastor Wes:** You're right — it doesn't. We live in a world full of noise, worry, and rushing around. There's conflict in the news, tension in homes, and sometimes even stress inside our own hearts. That's why Advent is so important — it invites us to stop, take a breath, and remember what *true peace* really means.

**Charlotte:** What do you mean by "true peace"?

**Pastor Wes:** The Bible uses a word for it — *Shalom*. It means more than just quiet or calm. It means *wholeness, harmony* — everything in its right place. That kind of peace starts inside us when we choose to trust God.

**Jack:** So, like when Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you"?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly! Jesus said, "*My peace I give you... not as the world gives.*" It's a peace that stays, even when life is hard. It helps guard our hearts and minds when we feel afraid or uncertain.

**Miriam:** That sounds really nice... but are we just supposed to *feel* peaceful, or do something with it too?

**Pastor Wes:** Another great question! This candle reminds us that we're also called to *be* peacemakers — to bring peace wherever we can. That might mean being kind when it's hard, forgiving someone, or choosing understanding instead of arguing.

**Erin:** So every time I choose kindness, I'm helping bring peace?

**Pastor Wes:** Yes! That's how it spreads — one small act at a time. As this candle of *Peace* burns next to the candle of *Hope*, its light reminds us to let God's peace shine through us.

**Charlotte:** I like that. It's like each flame helps light the next one.

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly. And you know what's special? The Peace candle is sometimes called the *Bethlehem Candle* — because it reminds us of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, (*O Little town of Bethlehem begins*) a rough and dangerous trip ending with the night true peace arrived in a troubled world — when Jesus was born in a sleepy little town.

### **SONG: O Little Town of Bethlehem (*House of the Rising Sun* Tune)**

**Erin:** So next week we light another candle, right? Which one comes after peace?

**Pastor Wes:** That's right — the third candle is the *Candle of Joy*. It's sometimes called the *Shepherd's Candle*.

**Miriam:** Why the shepherds?

**Pastor Wes:** I love that part. It takes us back to that quiet night in the fields — when the shepherds were just doing their normal work, watching their sheep, probably half asleep — when suddenly everything changed.

**Jack:** You mean when the angel showed up?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly! Out of nowhere, an angel appeared and said, "*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all people.*"

**Miriam:** I bet they were scared at first!

**Pastor Wes:** Oh, I'm sure they were! But then that fear turned into amazement... and then into *pure joy*, as they realized God had chosen *them* — ordinary shepherds — to hear the greatest news first.

**Charlotte:** That's so cool. God didn't go to the kings or the rich people first — just the shepherds.

**Pastor Wes:** That's right. This candle reminds us that joy often shows up in unexpected places — in the middle of our routines, our busyness, even our worries.

**Erin:** So joy doesn't mean everything's perfect?

**Pastor Wes:** Nope. True joy comes from knowing that God is with us — right where we are.

**Charlotte:** I like that. Even when life feels ordinary, God can still surprise us with joy.

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly. (*Go Tell It on the Mountain begins*) And that's why next week, when we light the *Candle of Joy*, we'll remember the shepherds — and the good news that still brings joy to all people.

### **SONG: Go Tell It on the Mountain**

**Jack:** So after the Candle of Joy, what comes next?

**Pastor Wes:** In two weeks, we'll light the *fourth candle* — the *Candle of Love*.

**Miriam:** Love sounds like a good one for Christmas.

**Pastor Wes:** It really is — because love is at the very heart of the story. As Christmas gets closer, this candle reminds us that God's love took on flesh and came to live among us — in the person of Jesus.

**Erin:** That's amazing — God actually *came here* because He loves us?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly. It's easy to get caught up in the rush of shopping, decorating, and planning this time of year, but this candle invites us to slow down and remember *why* Jesus came — because of love.

**Charlotte:** Like Mary and Joseph? They said yes to God even when it was hard.

**Pastor Wes:** Yes — and the shepherds, too. They ran to share the good news. Every part of the Christmas story shows love that *moves*, love that *acts*, love that *gives*.

**Jack:** So God's love isn't just something we talk about — it's something we *do*.

**Pastor Wes:** That's right. God's love isn't far away or meant for just a few people — it's here, right now, for all of us.

**Charlotte:** So when we light the Candle of Love, it's like we're saying, "We want to love like Jesus loves."

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly. (*God So Loved begins*) As that flame shines, may it remind us that we are deeply loved — and that we're called to carry that same love into the world, just as Christ did.

### **SONG: God So Loved**

**Erin:** So there's just one candle left after the Candle of Love, right?

**Pastor Wes:** That's right. On Christmas Eve, we'll light the very last one — the *Christ Candle*.

**Miriam:** That's the one in the middle, isn't it?

**Pastor Wes:** Yes! It sits right at the center of the wreath — because Jesus is at the center of it all. He's the reason for every candle we've lit along the way.

**Erin:** So the other candles — Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love — they all point to Him?

**Pastor Wes:** Exactly. And on that beautiful, quiet night, we light the candle that brings them all together — the light of *Christ*.

**Charlotte:** That must've been what it felt like when Jesus was born — light breaking into the darkness.

**Pastor Wes:** You're absolutely right. When Jesus came, everything changed. God's promise became real — He came to live among us, to bring light that never goes out. And that same light still shines today — in our hearts, our homes, and our world.

**Erin:** So when we light the Christ Candle, it means the waiting is finally over.

**Pastor Wes:** Yes — the Savior is here. *Christ, the true Light of the world, has come.*

**Miriam:** That's the best part of Christmas.

**Pastor Wes:** It really is. Every candle we light leads to that moment — the light of Christ shining in the darkness, reminding us that God is with us... always.

## **COMMUNION:**

And as we light the Christ Candle — the light that brings hope, peace, joy, and love together — we also come to the table of Christ.

Here, we remember that the baby born in Bethlehem grew to offer Himself for us all.

The bread is His body, given in love for all.

The cup is His blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin.

Come, and receive the gift of Christ — the Light of the world.

## **COMMUNION SONG: Christmas Eve Sarajevo**

## **COMMUNION BLESSING (in guide)**