

Four Directions Advent Candle Prayers

There are many ways of learning about God. In Native American tradition, knowledge of the Four Sacred Directions was given by the Creator to teach us right ways to live; to “walk the good road.” This Advent, we will look at Christian and Native traditions side by side, giving us a new window into this holy season.

ADVENT 1

Candle of Prophecy / The Eastern Direction

(Light)

The first candle of the Advent wreath is the Candle of Prophecy. God spoke through the prophets, promising them a Savior.

With this light, we honor the Eastern Direction, the home of new light. When we see the sunrise we know the Creator has given us a new day with new possibilities. The Direction of East teaches us to place our trust in the prophecy of salvation.

Creator God, whose prophets foretold the coming of Jesus, bless us as we turn to the East, remember the prophets, and await his coming. Amen.

ADVENT 2

Candle of Bethlehem / The Southern Direction

(Energy)

The second candle on the Advent wreath is the Candle of Bethlehem. Jesus was born not in a palace, but in an ordinary little town. He comes to us, too, in ordinary places, among ordinary people.

With this light, we honor the Southern Direction, the place of the spirit, the home of warmth and energy. The South teaches us to turn our energy to living in a good way among the people of our community.

Creator God, who brought Jesus to life in an ordinary town, bless us as we turn to the South and dedicate our energy to living with honor in our community. Amen.

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ADVENT 3 Candle of the Shepherds / The Western Direction (Emotions)

The third candle on the Advent wreath is the Shepherds Candle. It wasn't the rich and famous who came to worship the infant Jesus, but shepherds, who lived among the poor. As we light this candle, we remember the poor in our community; those Jesus loved.

With this light, we honor the Western Direction, the place of water, the home of emotions. The Direction of West teaches us to allow compassion to flow through us, as water flows down the River. As water unites all, we are united in God's love.

Creator God, as the shepherds felt your love when they received the good news, bless us as we turn to the West, feeling the power of your love for all people. Amen.

ADVENT 4 Candle of the Angels / The Northern Direction (The Earth)

The fourth candle of the Advent wreath is the Angels Candle. Angels announced the birth of Jesus, uniting the faithful around the earth in praise of God.

With this light, we honor the Northern Direction, the place of the earth, the home of the physical world. The Direction of North teaches us to thank the Creator for placing us physically on this earth, his holy creation.

Creator God, thank you for the angels who announced joy to the world. Bless us as we stand in the North, giving thanks for the joyful gift of our life on earth. Amen.

Chant to the Four Winds, by the Rt. Rev. Carol Gallagher, (Cherokee)

Come, Great Creator
Come, Life Giver
Come to this Sacred Place
Come and be with us.

Welcome our Relatives from the East
And bring your Gifts
Rising Sun and Gentle Waters
Soaring Eagle and New Vision

Welcome our Relatives from the South
And bring your Gifts
Our Rich Mother Earth
Innocence and Love

Welcome our Relatives from the West
And bring your Gifts
Thunder Drum and Wind
Oceans and Strong Hearts

Welcome our Relatives from the North
And bring your Gifts
Mighty Buffalo and Wisdom
Rivers of Harmony

Welcome Dear Christ
Our Circle is Complete
We Thank you for this Circle
And for the Home you have made
For us and for our Relatives.

There is setting of this text in *Voices Found #52 & First Peoples Theology Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, September 2001, p. 1.

The Four Directions and *Magnificat*

About the Images –

This image of a circle with four colors representing the Four Directions is used with some variation by many Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Many of the recent Episcopal liturgies, commemorating the ordination or consecration of an Indigenous deacon, priest, or bishop or the feasts of David Pendleton Oakerhater or Enmegahbowh, begin with a Four Directions prayer. This kind of prayer and image helps a worshipping community or individual to “orient” themselves, that is, to observe where the East is and to determine where they stand in relation to it.

As suggested by the poem, “Chant to the Four Winds,” by the Rt. Rev. Carol Gallagher, (see p. 15) a Four Directions perspective is useful for much more than simply determining one’s geographical location. Rather, a regular practice of noticing who and what surrounds us, literally and figuratively, becomes a means to knowing who we are and how we fit into the world. This is a view of the world and the self, determined not by the autonomous self of “the rugged American individual”, but rather from looking at one’s community, relations, history, land and taking in, with awareness and wisdom, the whole array of people, Creation, and events that collaborate to make us who we are, and sustains us in that identity.

“Circles are important to Native culture. Traditionally for Native people circles represent life. Inside the circle all of life is included: the two-legged, four-legged, finned, winged, all animals, plants, minerals, water. Roundness is seen in the shape of the earth, sun, moon, stars and structures, such as sweat lodges and tipis. In Talking Circles everyone is equal, there are no titles and each opinion is valued.” (*Elsie Dennis*)

An Advent wreath shares, with the image of the Four Directions, a circle with four points. It has become customary to think of those four points as the four Sundays of Advent marking the preparation, anticipation and commemoration of the first and second comings of Jesus the Christ into the world. Like the Four Directions, an Advent wreath serves to orient us to this season before Christmas. However, in strong contradiction to what is actually going on all around us in the wider culture, the Advent wreath calls us to think, hear, see and feel beyond the hectic events of December. The Advent wreath is a circle that invites us to look both to the past of our tradition and lives, as well as to the future with great implications for present day practices of hope and healing.

This Advent we are invited to ponder both of these images, side by side, in light of the strong language from one of the traditional prayers used at this time, the *Magnificat* –

“in every generation”

“scattered the proud in their conceit”

“filled the hungry ...and sent the rich away empty”

“cast down the mighty...and lifted up the lowly”