

## Three Purple, One Pink

By Sandra Humphrey

Advent is my favorite time of year! And not just because I know Christmas is coming and I'll get some cool presents.

Advent is the four weeks before Christmas when our family pulls out the box marked "Advent" and puts the Advent wreath together. My mom says that the wreath is a great way not only to celebrate Jesus' birth, but to make our hearts truly ready to receive him.

Right now she's got all the stuff laid out on the dining room table, and even my little brother Noah is excited.

"Ben, come here!" he yells. "We're doing the Jesus wreath."

Our Advent wreath has four candles arranged in a circle-three purple and one rose. The three purple candles symbolize hope, peace, and love, and we light those candles on the first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent. The rose candle symbolizes joy and we light that one on the third Sunday.

As I help my mom lay the little evergreen branches around the four candles, I can smell the pine scent and it smells really good. Mom says that the evergreen branches and the circular shape of the Advent wreath symbolize eternal life.

And then, right in the middle of the wreath, we always put a white candle. We call it the Christ candle because it symbolizes the birth of Jesus, and we light that one on Christmas day.

During Advent we eat only by the light of the candles, which I think is *really cool*. My dad always says a little prayer as he lights the candles. Noah loves to blow the candles out at the end of the meal.

The first week when we light only one purple candle, there is not a whole lot of light, but the second week we get to light two purple candles and then there is a little more light.

By the third week, when we light the pink candle, there is a lot more light. My dad says that the pink candle is a different color from the rest because it symbolizes Light overcoming darkness. When the first two candles are lit, there are still two unlit candles, but when the third candle is lit, Light wins!

Then the fourth week we light all four candles and there is a lot of light. On Christmas Day we light the white Christ candle and that's when I get my goose bumps. It's like Jesus is right there celebrating his birth with us.

After we finish making our Advent wreath, I'm upstairs lying on my bed just thinking, when I hear something strange coming from my brother's room next door.

I quietly open his door just far enough to peek in. I see him sitting there on his Lion King rug with tears streaming down his cheeks.

"So how's it going, big guy?" I ask, as I plop myself down on the rug next to him. "What are we trying to do here?"

He points to the colored construction paper and magic markers in front of him as more tears flow. "I'm trying to make the Jesus wreath like Mommy, but I can't do it."

"Not to worry," I tell him as I remember back to my first-grade Sunday school class with Mrs. Emerson. "I know what we can do."

I rush down to the basement where Mom keeps all kinds of craft supplies and grab four small cardboard rolls (the kind that come from toilet paper) and one large one that came from paper towels. On my way through the kitchen, I grab a large paper plate.

Then I grab some yellow tissue paper from my mom's stock of gift wrap and some old newspapers from the recycling bin on the back porch. I find the white glue and the paint set in my desk.

"Okay, guy, we're all ready to go," I tell Noah, as I plop down next to him with all my stuff and lay out the old newspapers all over his Lion King rug.

I notice Noah's tears have stopped flowing. Even though my brother has no idea what we're doing, he is faithfully following my instructions. Kind of like the way I trust Mom and Dad when I do what they tell me to do even though I don't always know why I'm doing it.

The first step is to paint the toilet paper rolls. Noah loves this. He sloshes purple paint on three toilet paper rolls while I paint the fourth one pink. Then I trim a little off the top of the paper towel roll and paint it white.

While the paint is drying on the cardboard rolls, I trim off a few little branches from one of our evergreen bushes in the front yard. These will go around the edge of the paper plate.

Then we drip some of the glue down the sides of the paper towel roll and toilet paper rolls and let it dry. Right now it just looks like globs of glue, but later I know it will look like melting wax.

While we're waiting for everything to dry, Noah settles in my lap while I read one of his Curious George books to him. And I wonder if this is how God feels when we spend time with him in prayer and just talk to him about our day.

When everything is dry, we glom some glue on the bottoms of all five cardboard rolls and stick them on the paper plate in a circle with the white paper towel roll in the middle. Then I rearrange the evergreen boughs around the "candles" while Noah's eyes get as big as silver dollars.

"We did it, we did it! My own Jesus wreath!"

"Not yet, buddy," I tell him, as I begin cutting up the yellow tissue paper. "We have one more thing to do."

I stuff gold tissue paper into the cardboard rolls and then pull it up just enough to "light" our candles. Noah's lights up even brighter than the candles on the paper plate, and he wraps his arms around me in a tight hug.

I don't have any idea what I'm getting for Christmas, but I think maybe Noah has just given me my best Christmas gift ever!