

THE ADVENT WREATH CALLED PATIENCE

Many years ago, in a small village, the people were busy with their daily work and lives. And on top of that, there was all of the extra preparation for Christmas. By the time Christmas would come, people would be exhausted and cranky.

One of the preparations was making and decorating wreaths. The wreaths were made of evergreen, to show that there was green and freshness even in the middle of winter.

Advent, or the weeks before Christmas, had just started. The mayor (or leader) of the village was looking for a wreath. He saw one on a table that seemed to call out to him, "Take me home!" He kept looking at all of the wreaths that were for sale, but that one wreath still seemed to be calling to him, "Take me home!"

"Oh, patience!" he was surprised to hear himself say. He realized that he was getting fussy, and it was over a month until Christmas. He paused, then picked up the wreath. Maybe he could do something so that people would think about the meaning of Christmas as they got ready for the day. He was not sure just how this wreath would fit into his plan, but he paid for it, and started to walk home.

Now the wreath was all excited. Maybe the mayor would put something fancy on it, like ribbon and bows and bells and glitter and nuts and fruit. Oh, this wreath wanted to be the prettiest, most festive wreath ever. But the mayor was walking slowly. He was thinking about what he could do to make people think about the meaning of the season as they got ready for Christmas. The wreath wanted to go faster, to get home and to be decorated. "Hurry up, hurray up!" it called. But the mayor was still walking slowly. "Hurray up, hurray up!" the wreath insisted. "Patience!" the mayor found himself saying.

When he got to his house, he thought about all the ribbons and bows and bells and glitter and nuts and fruit that he could put on the wreath. But all of those things would take away from the beauty of the green, and he really wanted to keep things simple. As he looked at the wreath, he thought of the things that made Christmas meaningful for him. One was the light from candles.

"Yes, yes!" said the wreath said the mayor brought out some candles. "Candles would be just fine. Come on, put some pretty candles on!"

The mayor took put on a candle. "That candle is for Faith," he said to himself. "Faith in the goodness of life that people have had all through time."

"Just one candle? Only one? More, more, more," the wreath cried.

"Patience," the mayor said. "Let me think." And he started thinking about other things that reminded him of the message of Christmas. There was Hope that gave him strength when things didn't seem to go well. That was the idea that he had choices and could do things himself to make things better. And then there was Joy of the season that people sang about in the Christmas songs, you know, the pleasure at seeing friends and the beauty of the season. And there was Love, or the way that people treated each other with respect and caring. He put a candle on the wreath for each of these.

"All these candles are great!" said the wreath. "But how about lighting them? That will make me even prettier."

The mayor just looked at the candles. "I can light a candle tonight. This will remind me to think about the gift of Faith. And next week, I will light the candle for Faith and also one for Hope. And the following week, I'll light the candles for Faith and Hope, and then one for Joy. And the Sunday before Christmas, I'll light those three and the last one, for the Love, that is really the meaning of Christmas.

"You mean I'll have to wait *for four weeks* to have all of my candles lit! That's too long. Much, much too long," the wreath cried out.

But the mayor was lost in thought. "Why should I keep this way of preparing for Christmas all to myself. I'll tell all of the people about this, so that they can put candles on their wreaths and light them to remember the gifts of the season."

"Four weeks is too long!" protested the wreath.

"Patience. Yes, patience is what we all need," said the mayor. He looked at the wreath and said, "I shall call you Patience. You will be with me for all of Advent, and will remind me to keep it simple as I prepare for Christmas."

"Patience," the wreath muttered. "Well, at least I'm part of the Christmas preparation."

And that's how the Advent Wreath came into being, and that's how the Advent Wreath came to be called Patience.

[Light the first candle for Faith.

Look at a calendar from this date until Christmas and note when the candles will be lit.]

(Adapted from Duncan Littlefair, *Christmas Anthology*, Carl Seaburg, p.238.)

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