

Mailbox Advent Wreath

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November 30, 2011

How it came about

Since our little subdivision puts up Christmas decorations the day after Thanksgiving and takes them down as soon as they can after Christmas, I was determined that this year I was going to do something to educate my neighborhood about the liturgical seasons.

Thought the best and easiest way would be to put up banners for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany.

But since I couldn't find any Advent flags or banners (other than those used for churches), I designed 3 banners myself.

The following were made in Microsoft Publisher, using Microsoft Office clipart (with some minor changes).

ADVENT



O Come, O Come,
Emmanuel!

CHRISTMAS



Today is born
Our Savior,
Christ the Lord!

EPIPHANY



O Come, Let Us
Adore Him!

I designed the banners in January 2011, but of course waited till October/November to start thinking about how to get them made.

I didn't do a lot of searching, but it seemed that most banner/flag makers were offering a vinyl one-sided banner with grommets, giving me the kind of sign a store might have when they're advertising a sale. Not what I had in mind...

Went back to my original search for banners that were already made. There are many beautiful Christmas flags around—even those featuring the Three Wise Men—but nothing for Advent.

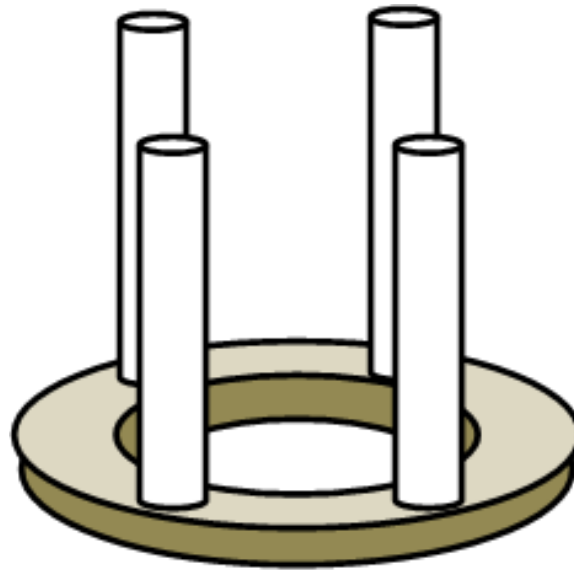
In the interest of full disclosure, there is one business on the Web offering a hand-sewn Advent house flag but I found it unattractive and too expensive.

As time got closer to Advent, I decided that for this year, I would buy ready-made Christmas and Epiphany flags, and make myself an Advent banner somehow.

Spent a long time trying to design something in crochet (my specialty) or sewn with nylon, sailcloth, felt, etc. But I'm not much of a seamstress, and time was running out.

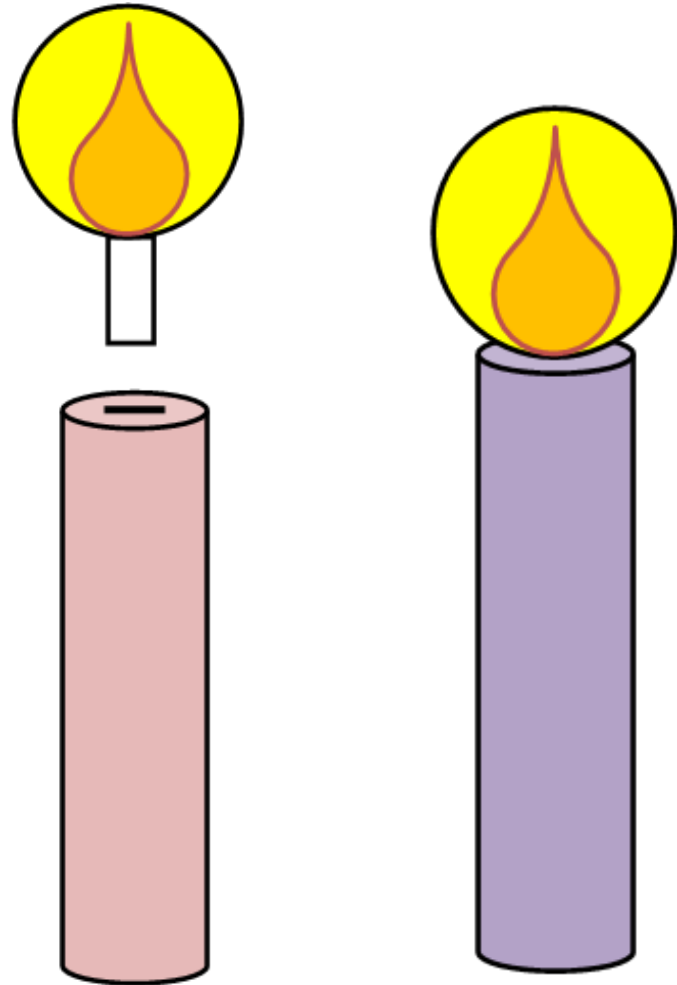
Finally it came to me as I lay in bed one night: to put an Advent wreath on the mailbox!

The original idea was to make it with wood. If I could get someone to cut me a circular wooden base, I could cut pieces of dowel for candles and glue/nail/screw them into the base like this:

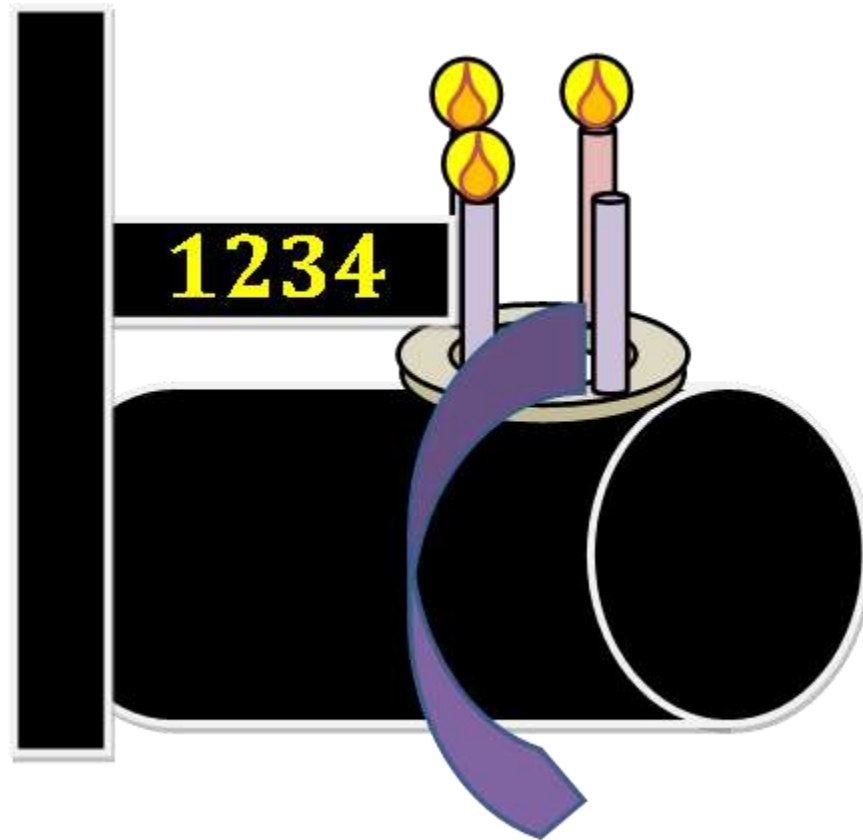


Hardest part would be how to “light” the candles.

Thought maybe some kind of slot could be cut in the dowels to insert a balsa wood “flame.”



I would attach to the mailbox with purple ribbon, then add greenery of some sort to hide the base and give a real wreath effect.



Asking the assistance/advice of the set designer at EWTN, he said he didn't think wood was a good idea for winter weather and suggested I look for a wire wreath with candle holders attached.

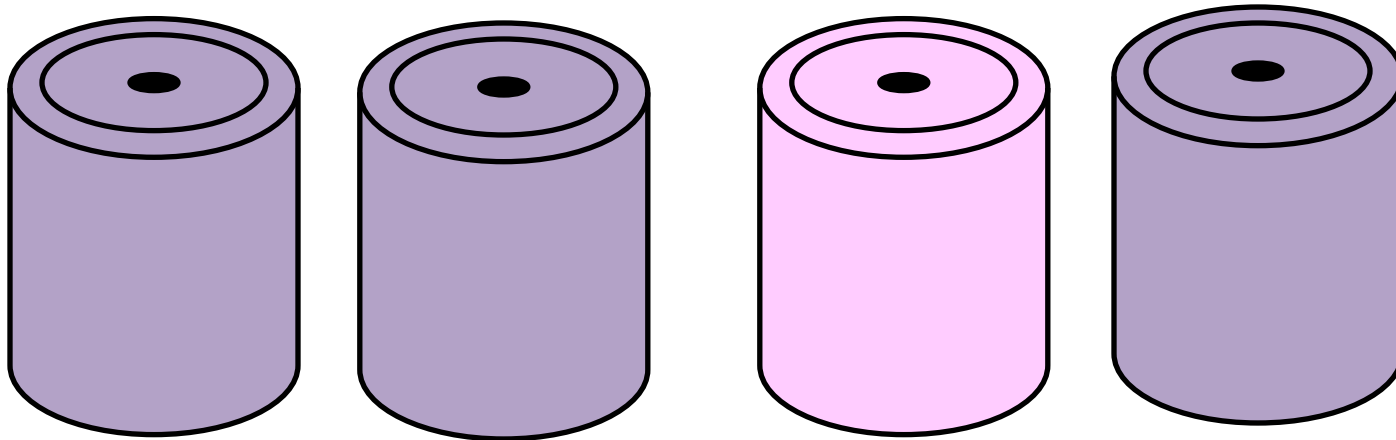
Took a while, but finally found one at Hobby Lobby. I didn't think it would be a good idea to put the metal ring directly on my mailbox, so selected a 10-inch straw wreath that I would use for padding under the wire wreath.

Still had the intention to use wooden dowels that I would cut and paint to serve as candles, but as I wandered through Hobby Lobby, I tried to look for other ideas.

When I came across craft foam sheets in many different colors, I started to wonder how I could use them to cover my wood dowels instead of having to paint them.

Then what to my wondering eyes should appear—but pink and purple can cozies!

Turn them upside down, and they look like fat candles!



I was thrilled with the idea of using foam cozies:

- They were \$1.00 each!
- They'd be waterproof.
- I wouldn't have to buy, cut, and paint wood.

Only problem was that I had to travel around to find 3 purple and 1 pink one. (They were at Michael's too.)

(I have to say that it was frustrating to have to travel around so much for this project: there was not one place that had everything I was looking for.)

The foam can cozies changed everything about my project. First thing I did was to put back the wire wreath—but I did keep the straw wreath.

I will now show you what I bought and how I put it all together.

Here's the 10" straw wreath



Attached straw wreath with green florist wire to a 12" green faux wreath.



What I would do differently

Even though that green wire is very fine, I later replaced the wire with brown twine in order not to scratch the mailbox at all.

However, the idea came to me that I could have used a silicone pot holder/trivet under the wreath to avoid any scratching to the mailbox. And the silicone would keep the wreath from sliding around on top of the mailbox too.

The candle wicks

What I really wanted was some clothesline to stick in those holes on the bottom of the cozies. It seems to me that clothesline is the exact thickness to stick in them and then stay in place. But I didn't have any and couldn't even find any.

At Joann Fabrics, I bought a yard of the thickest rope trim I could find, but it wasn't going to be thick enough to stand by itself in the hole. I tried securing it to a tongue depressor-sized wooden stick, but it wasn't going well.

I finally prayed to the Blessed Mother to give me an idea, and boy, did she ever!

Looking around the garage for something to use, my eye fell on a package of white 11" cable (zip) ties from Home Depot, and the light bulb went off: secured tightly around the straw wreath, they would stick up straight, just clearing the hole of the cozies!

Here is one of those cable ties with a small piece of the rope trim to make it look like a real candle wick. I was tickled pink with how well it worked.



Just to show you that the rope trim was “hollow” in the middle so that it could slip over the zip tie.



What I would do differently:



I should have cut longer pieces—at least 3 inches.

I also should have dabbed the top and bottom with glue or clear nail polish to keep from fraying.

Place the 4 zip ties in the exact spots you'll want the cozies.
Don't tighten all the way till you're sure.



Place the cozies over the “wicks” and then secure with t-pins into the straw wreath.



Now fluff the wreath up and around the cozies and straw wreath to hide the base.



I had some extra greenery that I pinned inside the center (to cover the straw wreath completely), although I don't think it was necessary: no one would be looking straight down on the wreath once on top of the mailbox.

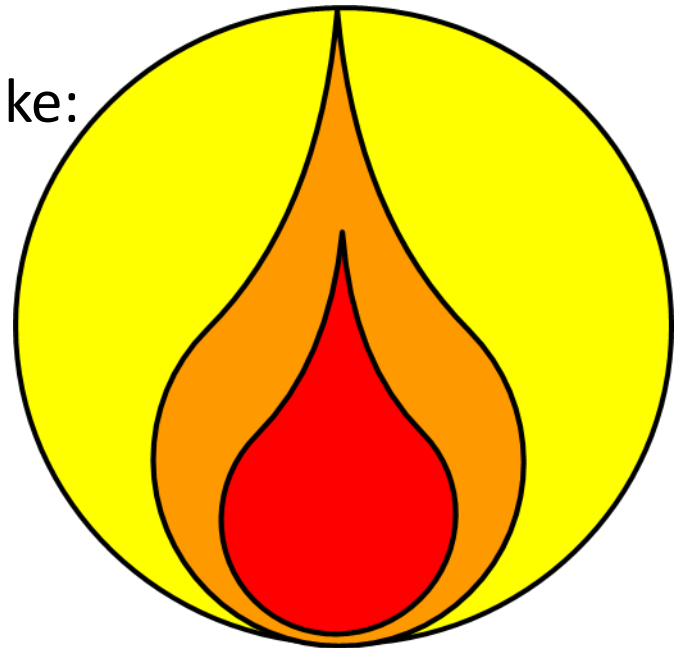


Candle flames

I bought red, yellow, and orange sheets of foam to use for the candle flames (and already had those tongue depressor-size wooden sticks to hold them in the candles).

Spent some time drawing various flame designs on paper to come up with one I liked best.

Here's a design you could use if you like:





I used a small can of mandarin oranges to cut yellow circles, then made free-form orange flames and red centers.

Remember to cut 8 of these so each flame will be 2-sided.

I used “craft foam glue” to glue these pieces together. (I had thought I would need to switch to waterproof glue, but the candle flame has been fine outside even after 2 days of heavy rain.)

Do not glue sticks all the way to the top: you want the two foam pieces to meet and make a good seal.



Be careful not to press your fingernails or anything else into the foam pieces when gluing. Use something smooth and flat to press pieces together. If I had any wax paper around, I would have covered a couple books with it and then used them to press the pieces together.

What I would do differently

I started by gluing 4 tongue depressors to 4 yellow circles, but if doing it over, I would start by gluing the red/orange pieces to the yellow circles first.



One completed candle flame.



It might seem a little too big, but I wanted it easily visible as people drive by.

The tongue depressor might seem too wide, but the cozy hole will stretch to hold it securely.

When inserting a flame each Sunday of Advent, just push the zip tie down into the cozy to hide.

Set Up



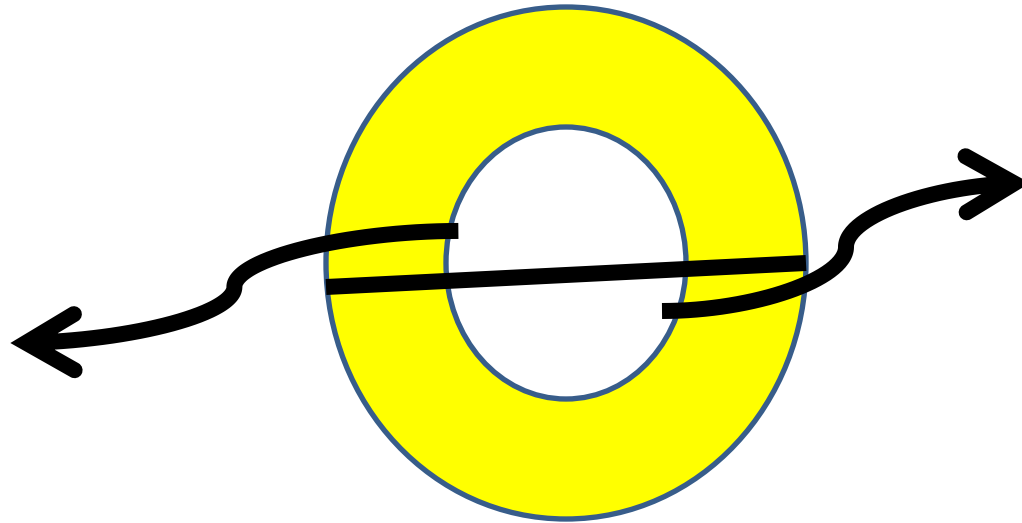
I took the wreath outside with twine and scissors and attached to the mailbox. Was pleased to find small holes along the bottom of the mailbox so ran the twine through those holes to secure tightly.

What I would do differently

After getting the whole thing set up, it occurred to me later that the best thing I could have done (I think) would have been to use black Velcro straps.

I would have started out at the very beginning by taking the straw wreath out to the mailbox and wrapping the strap around the straw wreath and then the mailbox in such a way that I could remove the entire thing if the weather got really bad.

This is how I would wrap the Velcro strapping around the straw wreath. Would probably have to secure with t-pins or a few stitches with a needle and thread.



How to hide the twine



Note that black Velcro straps wouldn't be so bad showing if you have a black mailbox like ours.

I had 2 purple bows that I found at K-Mart—but I was never able to find any more than that. You may have to make your own.



You may be saying, “But you can’t use your flag!” My husband is a letter carrier and has told me that putting the flag up is an invitation for someone to steal your mail.

The twine still showed when the bow ends blew in the wind, so I took some purple ribbon and wrapped it around the twine. Tied both ends at the bottom of the mailbox.

Ribbon
around
twine.



Finished wreath!



With the first flame.



But wait, there's more!

Almost all our neighbors put wreaths with red bows on every window, and it looks very nice. I do the same myself, but closer to Christmas.

To keep with the Advent theme, though, I wanted to use purple bows. But as I mentioned earlier, I couldn't find any more than the two purple bows I had gotten at K-Mart.

I was going to make my own, but then spotted a clump of purple poinsettias at Michael's. Each clump had 5-6 flowers and I think cost around \$8 each.



So that's what I used. Cut each flower stem about 12 inches down and then wrapped around the wreathes. They were much easier to use and attach than bows. In fact, when I switch to red bows at Christmas, all I have to do is pull the flower off the stem and leave the stem in place.

Not sure how necessary this was, but I sprayed the flowers (and mailbox bows) with Scotchgard.

I still wanted something that said “Advent” just to get the point across to our mostly-Baptist neighbors. (Would have liked to have added “Come, Lord Jesus” too, but just couldn’t figure out what to do at the last minute.)

I bought purple and white felt as well as purple and white craft foam in order to figure something out, and here’s what I ended up with:

For the front door



This little banner was put together with craft foam in white and purple, as well as pre-made sequined foam letters.

Once again, had to visit a couple Hobby Lobby locations before I could find all the letters in purple.

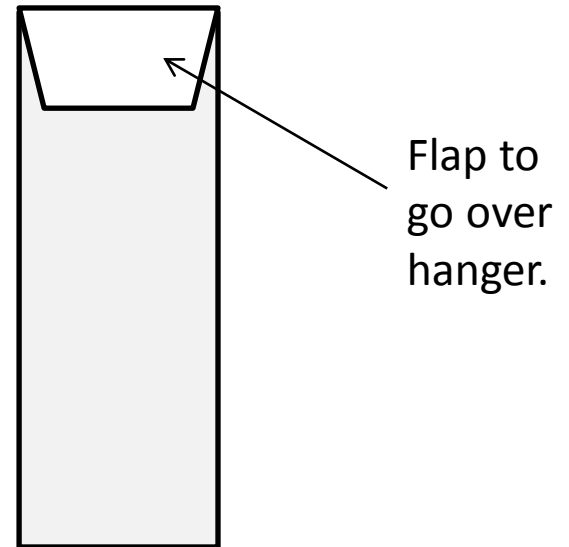
Tried to glue two pieces of white foam together, using a little extra piece behind, but it wouldn't stick. Had to staple the pieces at the edges.

Used ribbon glued to the edges to hide the staples.



I already had a little banner on the front door, so was able to use the hanger for it to hang this.

Using some extra foam, I stapled an extra piece to the back that would hook over the hanger.



In conclusion

All this was thrown together rather quickly, and I don't really expect that the wreath components will last more than this season. (The green wreath will survive, but all the other pieces might break down.)

I'll try to come up with even better ideas on putting this together more easily—and I welcome any suggestions you may have. You can contact me at OneTimothy2.1@gmail.com.

As for the front door banner, I do hope to come up with something better. I'm also going to contact The Printery House and see if they might consider making an Advent banner.

For Christmas and Epiphany, I have purchased the following garden flags and arbor stand online from Just For Fun flags:



On Christmas Eve, I will remove the Advent wreath from the mailbox, put up the Christmas flag and stand, and change the purple flowers to red bows on the window wreaths.

At Epiphany, I'll change the flag and *maybe* change the bows from red to gold. (Just for a little more differentiation.) At this point, I'll be the only one in the neighborhood—if not the town—with decorations still up.

Feel free to share these ideas with anyone you know. I'd be especially pleased if families and homeschoolers took on this project of putting up outdoor decorations for Advent. I'd love to one day see neighborhoods—and maybe even businesses?—honoring the season of Advent. And then remembering that the Christmas season is only just getting started on Christmas Day!

A Blessed Advent to you all!

Celine McCoy

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