Reflection for Advent Sunday

Firstly; Happy New Year! Why – we’ll discover soon. And why do we have an Advent Wreath?

The Advent Wreath first appeared in Germany in 1839. A Lutheran minister, working at a mission for children, created a wreath out of the wheel of a cart. He placed twenty small red candles and four large white candles inside the ring. The red candles were lit on weekdays and the four white candles were lit on Sundays.

Eventually, the Advent Wreath was created out of evergreens, symbolizing everlasting life in the midst of winter and death. The circle reminds us of God’s unending love and the eternal life He makes possible. Advent candles are often nestled in the evergreen wreath. Additional decorations, like holly and berries, are added. Their red colour points ahead to Jesus’ sacrifice and death. Pinecones symbolise the new life that Jesus brings through His resurrection. We begin lighting the candles on the fourth Sunday before Christmas – Advent Sunday today - and then light another candle each subsequent Sunday.

The most common Advent candle tradition, however, involves five candles. Each candle represents something different, although traditions vary. The four candles traditionally represent hope, faith, joy, and peace. Often, the first, second, and fourth candles are purple; the third candle is rose-coloured, and is lit on the day of joy called Gaudete in the otherwise solemn season. It’s also attributed to Mary.

Sometimes all the candles are red; in other traditions, all the candles are blue or white. In our case, the one white candle is placed in the middle and is lit on Christmas Day to celebrate Jesus’ birth, of course.

Advent and Christian Life

While Advent is certainly a time of celebration and anticipation of Christ’s birth, it is more than that. It is only in the shadow of Advent that the miracle of Christmas can be fully understood and appreciated, and it is only in the light of Christmas that the Christian life makes any sense. It is between the fulfilled promise of Christ’s first coming and the yet-to-be-fulfilled promise of his second coming. The promise for Israel and the promise for the church is Jesus Christ; he has come, and he will come again. This is the essence of Advent.

Advent lessons are themed Scripture readings for each Sunday of Advent. Let’s see how our readings relate to those four themes;

1. Hope (or promise) The coming of the Son of Man in great glory

2. Preparation (or waiting) John the Baptist crying in the wilderness – prepare the way

3. Joy (or peace) Do not be anxious and John proclaiming the Messiah

4. Love (or adoration) Mary and Elizabeth

Nowadays, perhaps we substitute the Advent Calendar for the Advent Wreath; but this can depend of the calendar itself. Does it tell the Advent and Christmas story – or just involve eating cheese or chocolate? What is the purpose and meaning?

Advent is always a time to look forward and to look back – a time to reflect. And it is a celebration, a quiet celebration; in some ways is it like the ordinary New Year? Can we include a different type of New Year’s Resolution even? We’re going to sing a different song now. The words may be new but you’ll recognise the tune, Abide with me. Let’s use this opportunity to re-set our approach to help make this community, town and country better places for everyone. Happy New Year!

Transform, Revive and Heal society.

We seek your kingdom throughout every sphere

We long for heavens demonstration here

Jesus your light shine bright for all to see

Transform, revive and heal society

Before all things, in him were all things made

Inspiring media, culture, craft and trade

May all our work serve your economy

Transform, revive and heal society

Peace, truth and justice reigning everywhere

With us be present in our public square

Fill all who lead with your integrity

Transform, revive and heal society

Forgive us Lord, when we have not engaged

Failing to scribe your heart on history’s page

Make us again what we were made to be

Transform, revive and heal society

Faithful to govern ever may we be

Selfless in service, loving constantly

In everything may your authority

Transform, revive and heal society