

A Service in the Spirit of Advent 2009

The People Who Walked In Darkness Have Seen A Great Light . . . (Isa 9.1)

Narrator:

"Advent" means "coming" and during the season of Advent, which marks the beginning of the Liturgical Year, people across the world celebrate the initial coming of God into the world through the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a time set aside for reflection. Marked by a spirit of expectation and hope, the four weeks leading up to the celebration of Christmas call Christians to focus on the birth of their Savior. We are in the midst of the season and one custom set aside for reflection is the advent wreath. Before we bless and light our advent wreath, let us read about its origin and traditions. You are invited to read.

Reader 1:

Advent wreaths have their origins in the folk traditions of northern Europe of lighting one candle each day before Christmas and all of them on Christmas Eve. It soon became a custom to surround the lit candles with evergreen branches as a ceremonial display in windows. The custom of the Advent Wreath has been adopted by many families, churches, and communities around the world.

Reader 2:

The advent wreath is made of a circle of evergreen branches laid flat to symbolize the endless nature of God's love for the people in this world. The circle of the wreath also symbolizes the eternity of God and reminds us that God has no beginning or end. Green symbolizes growth and the evergreen branches are reminders of our spiritual growth intertwined with God and our eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Reader 3:

The candles in the Advent Wreath remind us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. Traditionally, the wreath includes four candles for the four weeks before Christmas and a fifth candle symbolizing the birth of the baby Jesus. One candle is lit during the first week of Advent, two during the second week, three during the third week, and four during the fourth week. Thus, the light from the candles grows brighter as each week comes closer to Christmas reminding us that the birth of Christ brought us the "light of the world" and to follow Christ means not to "walk in darkness" but to "have the light of life (Jn 8. 12)." The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Eve along with the four others reminding us that "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Heb 1.3)."

B. The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Narrator:

This evening we will light all five candles. Three of the candles are purple which is symbolized in scripture as kingship and royalty. Purple was used in several features of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:1, 27:16) and the temple (II Chronicles 2:14). Purple was the color of royal robes (Judges 8:26) and the color of the robe placed on Jesus as he was led away to be crucified (Mark 15:17, 20).

One candle is pink which will be the third candle lit. Pink is a combination of White and Red. White symbolizes Christ's divinity and red symbolizes his humanity. As the Apostle John noted "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1.14). The pink candle is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent as a symbol of joy marking a shift from hope and preparation for the first two Sundays of Advent to a joyous atmosphere of anticipation and expectancy because Christmas Day is drawing near.

One candle is white which is the center candle and is called the Christ Candle. It is traditionally lit on Christmas Eve or Day. The central location of the Christ Candle reminds us that the incarnation is the heart of the season giving light to the world.

THE LIGHTING OF THE PROPHET'S CANDLE

(the first candle is lit)

Narrator: The first candle is called the **Prophet's Candle** and is meant to signify the hope of Jesus' arrival. Let us hear the words of the prophet and the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Reader: 4

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.¹

Reader: 5

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

¹ Isaiah 9. 6-7

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."²

Cantor (antiphon): Be patient until the coming of the Lord;
and strengthen your hearts,
for the coming of the Lord is near (Jm 5.7-8)

The Lighting of the Bethlehem Candle

(the second candle is lit)

LEADER: The second candle is called the **Bethlehem Candle** reminding Christians that God appeared to them in a humble manner in a little town. Let us hear how it was foretold that the little town would be the birth place of the Christ Child and hear about the actual birth.

Reader: 6

"But you, Bethlehem,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."

Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor gives birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.

² Matt 1. 18-23

He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be their peace.³

Reader: 7

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.⁴

Cantor (antiphon): Be patient until the coming of the Lord;
and strengthen your hearts,
for the coming of the Lord is near (Jm 5.7-8)

THE LIGHTING OF THE ANGEL'S CANDLE

(the third candle is lit).

LEADER: The third candle is the **Angel's candle** representing the joy they felt when they saw "the baby as he lay in the manger."

Reader: 8

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

³ Micah 5. 1-5

⁴ Luke 2. 4-7

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."⁵

Cantor (antiphon): Be patient until the coming of the Lord;
and strengthen your hearts,
for the coming of the Lord is near (Jm 5.7-8)

THE LIGHTING OF THE SHEPERD'S CANDLE

(the fourth candle is lit)

LEADER: The fourth candle is the **Shepherds' candle** which reminds us of the good news they declared.

Reader: 9

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.⁶

Cantor (antiphon): Be patient until the coming of the Lord;
and strengthen your hearts,
for the coming of the Lord is near (Jm 5.7-8)

⁵ Luke 2. 8 - 14

⁶ Luke 2. 15 - 20

THE LIGHTING OF THE FIFTH CANDLE

(the fifth candle is lit)

LEADER: The fifth candle is called the **Christ Child Candle** and it is white and symbolizes the purity of our Saviour's birth.

Reader: 10

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Cantor (antiphon): Be patient until the coming of the Lord;
and strengthen your hearts,
for the coming of the Lord is near (Jm 5.7-8)

C. Closing Thoughts: A Time of Collective Reflection

D. Closing Chant

Cantor: sings once before everyone joins in the meditation

Wait for the Lord,
Whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord:
keep watch, take heart
(Ps 27.14)

D. Closing Prayer

Let Us Pray:

We are an Advent People and
we will carry the light of these candles into the Christmas Season
so that we may find ourselves joyfully ready
to receive the Christ Child,
the light to all nations, the Word made flesh,
and who lives and reigns with us forever and ever—Amen.

MERRY CHRISTMAS