



# God has called you into his marvelous light!

Dear friends,

As we have journeyed through Advent, we have used the candles of our Advent Wreath to indicate visually our growing anticipation of Christmas, when we celebrate the gift of the birth of Jesus, Immanuel, God-with-us.

As you may know, the lighting of the Advent Wreath has its roots in pre-Christian Europe when people lit candles, often placed on a wagon wheel, as the winter solstice and the longest night of the year approached. Its "light-in-the-darkness" symbolism expressed their hope-filled anticipation of the lengthening of days that was to come. Early Christians saw in this ritual a powerful metaphor to celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Word made flesh - God breaking into our world. The light of Christ shines brightly; and we light a new candle each week of Advent, watching the light grow and ascribing a theme to each week: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

This is the heart of the Advent Wreath. There have been - and continue to be - variations in the colours of the candles used for the four Sundays of Advent and the order in which they are lit. Here are a few of variations with which I'm familiar:

- Four purple candles. In the history of the church, purple has been associated with both royalty and with penitence. For centuries, Advent (like Lent) was a penitential season that included confession and fasting as preparation for the celebration of the birth of the Kings of Kings. Four purple candles was the tradition that I grew up with.
- Three purple candles and one rose (or pink) candle. The rose candle may be lit on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, known as *Gaudate* (Joy) Sunday.
- In recent years, many churches have replaced the purple candles with blue ones. The blue symbolizes the virtue of hope that undergirds our waiting and anticipation as we prepare for Christmas. The use of blue also identifies Advent as a unique season in the church year, distinct from Lent.
- While lighting the rose candle on the 3rd Sunday of Advent is the most common pattern for candle-lighting, there is also a tradition of lighting it instead on the 4th Sunday of Advent, the Sunday that has Love as its theme. It is on this Sunday that we hear stories of Mary and Joseph (depending on the year) and their acceptance of God's will to parent Christ.
- In the United Kingdom and in some Roman Catholic traditions in Europe, all four candles are red.
- There is a fairly recent practice in which each of the four candles is a different colour: blue, green, rose and purple (or white). This pattern would visually give a distinct character to each Sunday and its theme.

I suspect that there may be other variations. Regardless of the colours used, however, all share a common meaning: journeying in expectation and anticipation, waiting and watching with a sense of destination and fulfilment. And this destination is symbolized by a white candle in the centre of the wreath, lit at

Christmas. Fulfilment is found in Immanuel: Jesus Christ who was and is God-with-us. In the Prologue of John, we read, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (*John 1:14*). I've always liked this verse as it reads in the original Greek: "The Word became flesh and pitched his tent with us." How evocative!

The many ways that Advent candle colours are used is instructive, at least for me: We may have many ways of journeying, but we all journey. We may have our distinctive paths, but our fulfilment - our destination - is the same: Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God's tent-pitching. Light in the darkness and the promise of what might be, summed up in Old Testament words made real in Jesus: Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace. Through him, God has called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light." (*1 Peter 2:9*)

There is a bit of a paradox in all of this, though, and an important one for us remember: the destination is just a rest stop. Christmas is only a beginning. Our arrival is temporary waypoint because Jesus asks us to continue the journey. There is a sense of fulfilment in the birth of Christ but not in the sense of a final arrival. While we might have been called into God's marvellous light, it is only so that we might continue to be light in the darkness because there is still darkness in our world. All that we proclaim through Advent - Hope, Peace, Joy and Love and the birth of Christ, symbolized with our candles - needs to be proclaimed throughout the year. Advent is always. Christmas is always.

We will acknowledge this at St. Mary's in a "real" way. We will joyfully celebrate our temporary waypoint on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, welcoming Jesus amongst us. On Sunday, January 1, our Sunday worship will be a service of Readings and Carols for Epiphany. Epiphany (January 6) is an important day in the church year. The culmination of the 12 days of the Christmas Season, it is a festival that, in part, acknowledges Jesus as the light of the world. "Arise, shine; for your light has come." (*Isaiah 60:1*) Light and candles are symbols for Epiphany and we will be reminded of our own call to continue to be light and to continue the journey, the seeds of which we planted in Advent. Come and hear the story so that you might be enriched and empowered to be light-bearers.

May you have a blessed and light-filled Christmas, seeing Christ in the midst of your life.

In his name,

The Rev. Bruce Chalmers  
St. Mary's, Sorrento

### ***Christmas at St. Mary's***

Sunday, Dec. 18, 10 a.m.	Advent IV
Saturday, Dec. 24, 7 p.m.	Christmas Eve Service
Sunday, Dec. 25, 10 a.m.	The Celebration of Christmas
Sunday, Jan. 1, 10 a.m.	Epiphany Readings & Carols