

## Theme: “Christmas Traditions” - Decorations

Text: John 1:1-5, 9-14 (EHV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. <sup>9</sup> The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world.

As you can see, last Sunday we put up our Christmas tree and Christmas decorations here at church. As usual it looks beautiful! Many of you probably also got your Christmas trees and Christmas decorations up last weekend as well. We did at our house too. The beautiful trees, warm glow of the lights, and beautiful **Decorations** are a favorite part of many people's Christmas Traditions.

But beyond just being beautiful and enjoyable to look at, do we always remember or realize that a number of familiar Christmas **decorations** actually were intended to also have a deeper, symbolic meaning to point our hearts and minds toward some important spiritual truths—and especially toward Jesus and the salvation He came to bring us with His birth at Christmas. So for this second Sunday in Advent we'll be taking a look at the Christmas Tradition of **Decorations** and remind ourselves of some of the spiritual meanings behind some of the most familiar ones.

✝ **The Advent Wreath** – One of the most prominent and most familiar **decorations** of the Advent and Christmas season is the Advent wreath. As you can see ours is displayed very prominently at the front of the church (as is the case with many churches around this time of year). At some point during this time of year I usually include in the bulletin an explanation of the Advent wreath, which says this:



*The Advent wreath is rich in symbolism, and as such it aids our worship as it reinforces our hope in the ultimate coming of our Lord. The wreath is covered with evergreen. Just as this species of tree is always green, so our hope for eternity is always alive because it rests upon the living Christ. The wreath is also in the form of a circle, which has no beginning and no end. What better way to picture that our life with God is everlasting.*

*The lighted candles are symbolic of the light of Christ and His Gospel, which alone can lift us out of our sin & spiritual darkness. The 4 Advent candles remind us of the 4000 years of waiting for Christ by the Old Testament world. The 3 purple candles are the color for repentance. The rose candle is the color for joy. Each of the 4 candles has been assigned a special name with special significance.*

The first candle is called the HOPE candle as we recall the HOPE we have in Christ. This candle is also referred to as the PROPHECY Candle. The prophets of Israel all spoke of the coming of Christ, of how a Savior would be born, a king in the line of David. They spoke of what He would be and how He would rule the world, bless all nations, comfort the lost, heal the sick, and suffer for our sins.

We, like the Old Testament believers, wait for the LORD's coming and HOPE in Him and His Word, with the sure and certain HOPE—the “joyful expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises:

**"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope...O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption." (Psalm 130:5, 7)**

The second candle of Advent is the Candle of PEACE. It is sometimes called the Bethlehem Candle to remind us of the place in which preparations were made to receive and cradle the Christ child. The prophecy in **Micah 5:2** that foretold Jesus' birthplace at Bethlehem may seem to be a minor revelation, but it shows how God prepared even the least detail for the coming of Christ.

PEACE is a gift that God gives to us through the reconciliation that He made with the world through the gift of His Only begotten Son. This peace is ours through faith in our Savior Jesus. The prophet Isaiah calls Christ "the Prince of Peace." Through the Apostle Paul we hear how God made PEACE possible for us:

**“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2).**

The third candle of Advent is the pink, or rose-colored, candle of JOY. It reminds of the JOY that Mary felt when the angel Gabriel told her that a special child would be born to her - a child who would save and deliver His people.

This candle is also called the Shepherds' Candle. The angel who announced to the shepherds that Jesus had been born told them:

**“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).**

The Shepherds, filled with JOY, went to see their Savior and then spread this joyous news far and wide. We light this candle to remember that Christ is the bringer of true and everlasting JOY. God wants us all to have this JOY. We light this candle to remind us to spread this joyful good news far and wide.

The fourth candle of Advent is the Angels' candle or the Candle of LOVE. It's light is meant to remind us of the LOVE that God has for us. Jesus shows us God's perfect LOVE. He is God's LOVE in human form.

**“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11).**

The white candle in the center of the Advent wreath is called the CHRIST CANDLE, and is lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. It signals that He Who is the Light of the world has been born. As our text from John chapter one tells us, **“The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world” (John 1:9 EHV).** More on this a little later on in our sermon.



✝ **Christmas Tree** - Probably the most familiar of all Christmas **decorations** is the Christmas tree. Do we always realize the spiritual symbolism of the Christmas tree? And are you aware of the origins of our modern-day Christmas trees? While the origins of the modern Christmas tree are debated, you'll find that many people attribute the modern Christmas tree to Martin Luther. Wikipedia states, "16th-century origins [of the modern Christmas tree] are sometimes associated with Protestant Christian reformer Martin Luther, who is said to have first added lighted candles to an evergreen tree."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas\\_tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree)

A delightful story about Martin Luther and the Christmas Tree can be found at this link:

<https://www.worldvision.org/christian-faith-news-stories/origins-decorating-christmas-tree>

Did you ever wonder why this type of tree, and not a maple or an oak tree, for example? Again, like the Advent wreath, the evergreen is a symbol of the eternal life we have been given by the living Christ. Did you know that we even find this symbolism in the Bible? In **Hosea 14:8** God compares Himself to an evergreen tree: **O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit” (Hosea 14:8 ESV).** Some have even found symbolism in the “triangle” shape of the Christmas tree as a reminder of the Trinity.

When we think of a “tree,” however, we also think of another very important part of the reason Jesus was born at Christmas: To die on the “tree” of the cross to save us from our sins. In fact, I’ve even known of some people, and some churches, who have live Christmas trees, after the Christmas season is finished will trim down the branches of the tree to leave only the shape of a cross. Referring to the “tree” of the cross, the Bible tells us, **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”) (Galatians 3:13).**



✝ **Lights** – Would you agree with me that your favorite part of Christmas decorations is the lights? We love to go out and look at the various Christmas light displays you see all over the place this time of year. One of my favorite things to do at Christmas time is to just sit on the couch in our living room and relax in the warm glow of the Christmas lights from our Christmas tree.

Well the symbolism here is pretty obvious, isn't it? It's been mentioned a few times already and it is made very clear in our Scripture reading from Isaiah and from our sermon text from John chapter 1. The lights of Christmas are meant to remind us of Jesus the **“great light” (Isaiah 9:2)** that came to shine in this dark world of sin and unbelief. **“In him [Jesus],” John tells us, “was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world” (John 1:4-5, 9 EHV).**

When you see the **decorations** here in church, in your home, and around town this Christmas season, let's not just think, “How beautiful!” Let's be reminded of the “evergreen” of God's everlasting love for us and the everlasting life He's given us in sending His Son Jesus. When we see beautiful Christmas trees, let's not forget that the reason Jesus came—the reason we can truly celebrate the birth of Jesus—is because of His death on the “tree” of the cross where He paid for all of our sins. And when we see the beautiful Christmas lights, let's think of Jesus, the “Light of the World,” the “Light of Life!” And let's be like John the Baptist, **“He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light” (John 1:7-8 EHV).** Live in that light of Jesus. Reflect His light in your life, and share that life-giving light with others. Amen.