

Advent Hope

Sermon November 28, 2021 - First Sunday in Advent

Advent is a time of expectation and hope. “Advent” means “arrival” or “coming”. The advent wreath and candles help us to remember why Jesus came at Christmas.

We light a candle on each of the four Sundays in Advent and one on Christmas Day.

- The light of the candle flames reminds us who Jesus is: *“In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”* John 1:4-5.
- Additional decorations, like holly and berries, are sometimes added. Their red colour points ahead to Jesus’ sacrifice and death on the cross, shedding his blood for our sins.
- Pinecones symbolize the new life that Jesus brings through His resurrection.

Now, let us see the meaning and symbolism of the Advent candles.

Advent candles shine brightly in the midst of darkness, symbolizing and reminding us that Jesus came as Light into our dark world.

Our traditional Advent wreath involves four candles around the wreath. A new candle is lit on each of the four Sundays before Christmas. Each candle represents something different. The first, second, and fourth candles are purple; the third candle is rose-coloured. A fifth white candle is placed in the middle of the wreath and is lit on Christmas Day to celebrate Jesus’ birth.

The first candle symbolizes hope and is called the “Prophet’s Candle”. The prophets of the Old Testament, especially Isaiah, waited in hope for the Messiah’s arrival. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah. The purple colour symbolizes royalty, repentance, and fasting.

The second candle represents faith and is called “Bethlehem’s Candle”. The prophet Micah had foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, which is also the birthplace of King David. The “Bethlehem Candle” is a reminder of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. The second candle is also purple to symbolize preparation for the coming king.

The third candle symbolizes joy and is called the “Shepherd’s Candle”. To the shepherd’s great joy, the angels announced that Jesus came for humble,

unimportant people like them, too. This candle is coloured pink, a liturgical colour for joy, to represent joyfulness and rejoicing.

The fourth candle represents peace and is called the “Angel’s Candle”. It reminds us of the message of the angels: “Peace on Earth, Good Will toward Men.” The angels announced that Jesus came to bring peace. He came to bring people close to God and to each other again. This colour is also purple to represent the culmination of love through the Messiah.

The fifth candle represents light and purity and is called “Christ’s Candle”. It is placed in the middle and is lit on Christmas Day. This candle represents the life of Christ. The colour white represents purity, because Christ is our sinless, pure Saviour.

Celebrating Advent is an excellent way to prepare our minds and hearts for Christmas. During this Advent, may the Holy Spirit help us to remember the beauty and grace of Jesus. He entered our dark, broken world on the first Christmas long ago, and He is working even now to restore light, peace, and life. May your Calvin family and your own families find rich blessings from incorporating the advent wreath into our celebration of this season, as we prepare our hearts and minds for the anniversary of the Lord’s birth on Christmas. May the God of hope fill all of us with all joy and peace as we trust in Him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, in our golden verse, we read and memorized Romans 15:13: *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”*.

May this first Advent Sunday these words of Advent hope touch us deeply and continue to stay with us in our prayers and conversations with God. HOPE!

The first Advent Sunday is dedicated for ADVENT HOPE. Why do we talk in Advent about Hope?

Our world desperately needs hope. I just came back from British Columbia, where these days we hear of floods. In other parts of our world, we heard about tornadoes, wars, bombings, devastation by gunfire. We see never-ending conflicts. No wonder we all need hope. We long for hope that all these one day will end, when our Lord Jesus Christ will return as the King of Kings, and will restore our wounded world. Today let us focus our eyes and hearts on the God of hope.

As we shared our hope, we shared our expectations about a better future. Hope gives us positive creative energy, drives us forward, seeking Jesus, longing for Him. For us, God is the source of all hope and the reason to rejoice. God is the only one who can give us hope in a better future, and our Lord will not leave us in despair.

How can God give us hope?

Our Heavenly Father already gave us an overflowing hope through His gift, His son Jesus Christ. God is always with us even in the difficult times. He never leaves us, and He loves us in all of our times. Our Heavenly Father is here today again to pour upon us hope as optimism, faith and courage to live. Our future is prepared by God. Our future is in God's hands and, for this, we live in hope. We can anticipate a better tomorrow even when we struggle with the sad realities of today. We have to keep our eyes on the God who gives us hope.

Somebody said that God gives us enough happiness to make us sweet, enough trials to make us strong, enough sorrow to keep us human, and enough hope to make us happy.

Let us read together again Jeremiah 33:14-15. *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land."*

Hope is more than a feeling; it is not just being perpetually optimistic or having a "hopeful" attitude. God offers us an understanding of hope. God is our hope.

God, *"in his great mercy ... has given us new birth into a living hope"* 1 Peter 1:3.

And it is our "God of hope" who enables us to *"overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* Romans 15:13.

This reality is true even in dark and difficult times, when we might lose our hope.

After a long period of pandemic, separation, and loneliness, we are longing to connect and resume relationships and activities. As we start to come out of our pandemic isolation and seek reconnection, let's also celebrate and strive to connect with Jesus, our brother and Saviour, who chooses to be "with us" at Christmas and always. I'm filled with hope that at this Christmas we will be able to celebrate with joy the truth that God in Jesus chose to be "with us". The hope of Christmas is that God desires to connect with you and that you are a special part of His family.

Advent reminds us that we are never alone, never without hope. Emmanuel: “God with us.” Let us pray in this Advent pondering and beholding hope.

I will leave you with three homework questions for this week:

- What are you hoping for this Advent season?
- How can you put your hope in God?
- How can you share this message of hope to others who still remain in spiritual darkness and separated from Christ?

Amen