

### Jesus Is the Light of the World

It is fun to learn how doctrinally sound Lutherans like us are capable of doing something that is warm and fuzzy once in a while. We have an example of that in our church this evening. It is the Advent wreath by the lectern over there. Advent celebration has been around in the church since the middle ages. But in 1839 a Lutheran pastor serving at an orphanage in Germany came up with the idea of a wreath. Give him an A for being innovative. He took an old wagon wheel, rigged up a means of hanging it, and he placed twenty red candles around its perimeter, the wheel, and four white candles in the middle. These represented the 24 days of advent. One red candle was lit for each weekday and a white one was lit on the Sundays.

Today pine branches twisted into a circle replaces the wagon wheel. This wreath is often decorated with holly branches, red berries and pinecones or seeds. But the most dominant feature of the advent wreath are its five candles. Different traditions and customs have different colors for them, but we here use three purple, one pink. These represent faith, hope, joy and peace, and the reason we can have all four is the white candle in the middle. This white candle isn't lit until Christmas Eve or Day. Do you see what the Advent Wreath is doing for you? Because Jesus is born, we have faith, hope, joy and peace. We have faith that this is true. Such faith produces hope for us, hope that our sins will not keep us out of heaven. We joy that we are saved. And all of this is possible because peace between us and the Lord whom we insulted with our sins is established. The wreath also tells us why. The prickly holy branches remind us of the crown of thorns he would wear on his head. The red berries represent the blood he shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Because he endured those things, we have eternal life represented by the circular wreath. A circle never ends. Our new life in Christ never ends; even death can't break the circle because of the resurrection.

And we use candles. These candles shed light into a world darkened by sin and unbelief. These candles shine into our lives so we see. This is your Savior. This is your faith, hope, peace and joy. Picture it this way. You know the parable of the Lost sheep. The Shepherd in the parable, Jesus, shows us how zealous for folks like us who wander away. He leaves the ninety-nine sheep in the field and he searches high and low until he finds the lost sheep. Then he places the sheep on his shoulders and carries us home to heaven. He is doing that for you right now. Picture yourselves, not as spectators, not merely as admirers, but on the shoulders of Christ who has found you.

Let me conclude with this picture of Christ as our light from John chapter one: **The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Amen.**