December 17, 2023 **SHOUTS OF JOY!**

"In our Advent Wreath, three candles are purple, and one is pink. Why is there one pink candle?" An Advent wreath is one of the traditional accessories for the season. The wreath is decorated with greenery and laid upon a stand. A large white candle, called the Christ Candle, stands in the middle of the wreath and four candles are placed into the wreath surrounding the central white candle. The four candles may be all blue, all purple, or three purple and one pink. These candles are lit on successive Sundays in Advent, one for each week. The pink one is lit on the third week and the Christ Candle is lit on either Christmas Eve or Christmas day.

Now, why the pink candle? During the early church, the only church season was the Lent season, the seven weeks prior to Easter. Lent was a season of fasting and prayer as the church commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. The traditional color of banners in the church during this time was a deep purple, signifying royalty, repentance, and suffering. During Lent the church lit seven candles, one for each week of the solemn season. However solemn the season, the story of Lent also has a twinge of hope and joy since the death of Christ prefigured the resurrection. So, on the third Sunday of Lent, the church was encouraged not to fast, but to feast. In ancient times on this third Sunday of the lent, the Pope would honor a citizen with a pink rose, and as time passed the priests wore pink vestments on this day as a reminder of the coming joy.

When the season of Advent was instituted, the church theologians viewed it as a mini-Lent, a time for reflection and repentance (thus the purple). In so doing, the church adopted the first four candles of Lent and changed the third candle of Advent to pink in honor of the Lenten tradition. Therefore, we have a pink candle in our Advent Wreaths.

To further heighten the sense of anticipation of Christ's coming during Advent, the church named each candle in the wreath -- the first being hope, the second peace, the third joy, and the fourth love (there are several other traditional names as well, though these are some of the most ancient). It has always seemed fitting to me that the pink candle is the candle of joy, the one that speaks to us with its twinge of color.

Today is the 3rd Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Joy. This is the church’s preparation for the celebration for the coming of Christ; but this doesn't always relate to what the world is going through, as many people see the weeks before Christmas as something to endure ... rather than enjoy. Do we as Christians look forward with joy towards Christmas; because there is more depression and suicides around Christmas time, than any other time of the year? This therefore does not suggest the season of joy.

Even John the Baptist in our Gospel lesson John 1: 6 - 8, 19-28, this morning is very depressed. John is wondering if Jesus is the Messiah that he has been proclaiming. After all, John is in prison because he was doing the Lord’s work, and now John is wondering whether he was doing what God wanted him to do; because if Jesus was not the Messiah, then everything had been in vain. Now John was the first prophet to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, and much of John preaching came from the Old Testament itself.

For thousands of years, the Jewish people had been praying for a Messiah, a deliverer who would conquer their enemies and establish a kingdom of righteousness and might. Their deliverer would be powerful, a warrior and a king, and through His power, the Jews would again reign in peace and prosperity. Then along the line comes Jesus. A poor carpenter with questionable friends and disciples who claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah: come to set up a very different kind of kingdom.

John the Baptist had also been praying for this Messiah all his life. John had even been demanding a stern call to penance for those who would follow him; while being judged harshly and condemned by the powerful ruling religious establishment; the Pharisees. John's idea of Jesus was therefore one of a warrior type, someone who would preach fire and brimstone. John had even said to himself that when the Messiah appeared He would baptize with the "Holy Spirit and with fire." John the Baptist was the witness to the light of Christ. He was the light that would lead people to Christ. If you like to know more, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace and Blessing of Advent!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister