

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ... The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world”*** (John 1:5, 9).

We prepare for Christmas with decorations, such as candles and electric lights. Tonight, we are continuing our series on how common decorations used for Advent and Christmas also prepare us for the coming of Christ. Tonight, during this second midweek in Advent, we will focus on how lights help us prepare for the coming of Christ.

As you make your way around this Advent season, you likely see sparkling lights everywhere. Some strings of lights cover the spectrum of colors; others are clear white. Many of us decorate our homes with lights not just on the inside, but on the outside. Some neighborhoods hold competitions for the best exterior light display. Communities string lights on their streets and poles. Businesses decorate buildings with dazzling displays of lights.

Here in the chancel, we see lights displayed for the season. During Advent, we display the Advent wreath, which holds five candles that we progressively light as we approach Christmas. The Christmas tree has been wrapped with strings of electric lights that shine.

Why do we decorate with lights for Advent and Christmas? What value is in the lights? Could there be a deeper significance to these lights? To answer these questions, let’s consider when lights were first used for Advent and Christmas and what their original meaning and purpose were.

Last Wednesday, we learned that the use of the Christmas tree began in Germany in the Middle Ages. And the practice of attaching candles to Christmas trees began in the 1500s. You also learned that the first Christmas tree placed in a church in America caused quite a stir. Leave it for a Lutheran to do such a thing! In fact, it is believed that it was Martin Luther himself who first placed an evergreen tree in a church.

Over time, the practice of including an evergreen tree caught on and it became more common. In time, candles were attached to the tree branches by pins, then holders, then by lanterns. These lights reminded Christians of the lights that accompanied Christ's birth, including the Bethlehem star and the angels who lit up the night sky with the glory of God. Candles reminded people that Christ is the Light of the World.

And this tradition came by the way of German Lutheran immigrants in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. And again, over time, this practice of decorating evergreen trees with lights was culturally adopted by Americans.

Thanks be to God that He inspired Thomas Edison to invent the light bulb in 1880. For since the invention of the light bulb, the risk of fires has significantly decreased. At first lamps were extremely expensive, but by the 1930s, strings of lights have become more affordable, and by the 1950s, they became standard decorations at American homes.

Christmas lights are certainly beautiful. But for Christians, they hold a much deeper meaning. In the Bible, darkness is the symbol for sin and light is the symbol for righteousness. So, lights at Advent and Christmas point us to the purpose of Christ's advent: to remove sin and restore us to righteousness.

The Fall into sin brought spiritual darkness to man. People lived in the darkness of evil and deception. But God promised a light to break the darkness of sin. That Light would appear with the advent of the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming Christ this way: ***"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone"*** (Isaiah 9:2). Isaiah went on to announce this Light breaking in through the birth of a child, the Son of God: ***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given"*** (Isaiah 9:6).

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the advent of Christ into the world. Jesus' birth was signaled by the light of a special star that guided the Magi (Matthew 2:1-2, 9-10); this brilliant astronomical beacon led them to the Christ Child. His birth was also heralded by the luminous glory of the Lord that shone around the shepherds (Luke 2:9).

John's Gospel does not narrate the events of Jesus' birth, but it does describe the impact of His birth. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, John wrote: ***"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world"*** (John 1:9). You see, Jesus came to enlighten everyone with His own righteousness and glory.

Later, Jesus announced: ***“I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”*** (John 8:12).

By grace through faith in Christ alone, we, who were once caught in the darkness of sin and death, now receive Christ’s light of righteousness and glory.

Those candles of the Advent wreath and the lights on the Christmas tree celebrate the first coming of Christ ***“who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”*** (2 Timothy 1:10).

These lights also point us to the final advent of Christ on the Last Day. You see, Jesus’ return will inaugurate a new creation in which the darkness of sin ends and the light of righteousness endures forever. We who are made righteous through faith in Christ will abide in that eternal righteous realm.

The Word of God uses the symbolism of light to reveal the brilliant future Christ will inaugurate for us at His final advent saying, ***“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk”*** (Revelation 21:23-24).

Tonight, we still see the darkness of sin in our fallen world and in our own sinful nature. But through the work of the Holy Spirit, we disavow that sin and repent of the darkness in us. Because of the righteousness of Christ given to us by faith in Him, we no longer fear a dark future. Instead, we anticipate His final advent in which Jesus will disperse the darkness forever and bring us to dwell in His glorious light forever.

Light decorations are visible everywhere we go this season and for us, they do convey a powerful message: the light of Christ’s righteousness has come to disperse the darkness of sin. That is what Advent is all about – the eternal glory that Jesus won for us at His first advent and that we will fully experience when He comes again.

So, every time you look at Advent and Christmas decorations emanating light, remember their message: Jesus has come, and He will come again to bring you the light of His righteousness and His glory! Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**