

Third Sunday of Advent

Our Advent wreath features prominently in the church during the Season of Advent. As I think I have explained previously there are no fixed meanings to the different candles. One common interpretation has the candles representing hope, peace, joy and love. Another possibility is to see the candles representing various Biblical characters which feature in Advent and our readings at Mass this weekend help us to explore this a bit further.

Our first candle can represent the prophet Isaiah who accompanies us from the very beginning of the season. In today's First Reading (Isaiah 61:1-2.10-11) we hear from the final part of the book of Isaiah which expresses the joy of the people of Israel as they return to their homes after their time of exile. This is the passage from Isaiah that Jesus reads in the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of his public ministry (Luke 4:18-19). In as much as we experience our current predicament as a time of exile we too long for a 'year of favour from the Lord' and we hope that it is not too far away.

Our second candle can represent John the Baptist who we were first introduced to last weekend on the Second Sunday of Advent. We hear more about him this weekend in the Gospel Reading (John 1:6-8.19-28). John is the one who precedes Christ not only in the timing of his birth and also as the one who bears witness to him announcing his imminent coming to the people even as he stands among them, still at this stage unknown.

Our third candle is the one which is a different colour, rose rather than purple, and it is lit today on Gaudete Sunday (rejoicing Sunday). I would like to suggest that it might represent Our Lady who is a central character during Advent and who we think about more and more as the season unfolds. Today's responsorial psalm is not actually a psalm but rather an extract from the Magnificat (Song of Mary) (Luke 1:46-55) during which Mary expresses her joy in the great things which the Almighty has done for her. These words are given to us in the Scriptures so that we too can use them as a prayer by which to glorify God, expressing our joy in the great things that God has done and continues to do for us even in the difficult circumstances that we have found ourselves in this year.

If we were to continue on lighting the candles I would suggest that the fourth candle might represent Saint Joseph, sometimes the forgotten character in the Nativity story, but someone whose life also bears witness to the light which is Jesus.

So whether you have an Advent wreath at home, or whether you simply note the one we have here in church, then take time to reflect how the different characters represented by the four outer candles bear witness to Jesus Christ who is represented by the central candle, the true light, 'the light that shines in the darkness, the light that darkness could not overpower' (John 1:5).

We pray that our lives too might be lit up by his grace, so that like the outer candles on the wreath we too can be his witnesses, bearing our witness to the light which has come into the world and which continues to shine to this day.

For YouTube video link: <https://youtu.be/KPGtCrQArcE>