

SQUAMISH UNITED CHURCH
Advent 1 - Hanging of The Greens

November 27, 2011

The **lighting of candles** has been a part of religious worship for centuries. The Hebrews burned candles for eight days as part of their Feast of Lights. Light has been used by many religious groups to symbolize truth, while the darkness of night has been the universal symbol for evil. Since Jesus was called “the light of the world” in the New Testament, the lighting of candles has become an important part of our Christian worship.

As we light these candles upon the communion table, we symbolize God, Emmanuel, God with us, whose transforming power heals the world of sin and evil, war and strife, stress and turmoil, suffering and despair. Jesus embodies hope and help for those held captive by oppression. His ministry guides us to personal peace and joy through the illumination of his message of the love of God. *(Elizabeth and Carol light the large candles and some small battery tea lights)*

Hymn We Are Marching VU 646 *(Choir to process in)*

Welcome/announcements and minute for mission

The Meaning of the Service

As we begin the Christian Year, we also celebrate the Holy Season known as Advent. It is a time when we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Messiah. Advent means "Coming." We celebrate these days of Advent in expectation and preparation for Jesus' arrival.

Through the centuries, Christians have observed a time of waiting and expectation before celebrating the birth at Christmas. The Advent season is a time for reflection and preparation, but its mood is joyful. Advent has been enriched by Christian tradition to reflect its distinctive Christian meaning. It proclaims the revelation of God's love as expressed in Jesus' birth in a humble stable, His sacrificial death on the cross, and His victorious resurrection! It points to the hope of Christ's coming again as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Advent makes innkeepers out of all of us, asking each of us to make room for the arrival of Christ The King. Let us, today, prepare Him room in our hearts, our lives, and our homes!

Hymn: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, verses 1,3

CALL TO WORSHIP

How shall we prepare this place for the birth of Jesus?

With branches of cedar, the tree of excellence and strength.

How shall we prepare this place for the eternal Christ?

With garlands of pine and fir, whose leaves are ever living, ever green.

How shall we prepare this place for the prophet of Galilee?

With wreaths of holly and ivy, telling of his passion, death and resurrection.

How shall we prepare our hearts for this revelation of God?

By hearing again the words of the prophets and the promises of God.

For in the story of Jesus we see revealed the transforming power of God

We are reminded anew of God's vision

We remember a life of wholeness, justice, and peace for all of creation.

Thanks be to God.

Opening Prayer

Advent God, we come before you with hearts ready for your Love. We are waiting in hope to receive your Beloved into our lives, once again. Be with us in our waiting and help us to prepare ourselves to receive all that you offer to us in his life and his living. As we wait, we seek your forgiveness for the ways in which we want to rush ahead, for the ways in which we cut corners, for the ways in which we have lost hope. Forgive our hastiness and unfaithfulness. Fill us with the patience and care to prepare for Immanuel, that we may truly know God with us Amen.

Lessons of Christmas

Let us listen to the lessons of the years and the centuries, not just to impressions of the moment. The images of the present in the biblical story are often discouraging - war, hate, famine, epidemics, a Caesar on his throne, a Paul in prison, Christians being persecuted. But now, after the centuries, the Caesar is gone; Paul is a symbol of Faith; and Jesus, the Truth and the Light, is reaching out to every nation!

Let us, through the great traditions of our Faith, join with the shepherds of Bethlehem, the wise men from the east, and the seekers throughout the ages, to welcome the One who came at Christmas. Let us at Christmastide bring our gifts to Him, and may the message of our songs be "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, Peace and goodwill to peoples everywhere."

Hymn - Hark! the Herald Angels Sing!, verses 1, 2, 3

The Bells of Christmas

Christmas joy naturally overflows into music. About the fourth century A.D. bells brought forth in glad song Christmas. Church bells, which have gladdened the hearts of people throughout the ages, are said to have been originated by Bishop Paulinus of Nola in Campania, Italy, who died in 431 A.D. Medieval peoples had a tender feeling for bells. They were dedicated with prayers and regarded as almost living beings. Historical bells that have rung out the glad news at Christmas are the Emperor Bell in Moscow, the Great Bell of China at Peking, Big Ben of London, and the Liberty Bell of Philadelphia. However, it is church bells in every community around the world, that have found their way into each of our hearts.

Special Music with Handbells

Advent Wreath

Advent is a time of expectation, and this is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of an Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The four candles provide us with a visual way to count off four Sundays of this season. The flame of each new candle reminds us that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season is not complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The tradition of the Advent wreath is traced back to an old Scandinavian custom that celebrated the coming of light after a season of darkness. In that day, candles were placed on the edge of a horizontal wheel. As the wheel was spun around, the lighted candles would blend into a continuous circle of light. Today we use a circle of evergreen to remind us of the continuous power of God, which knows no beginning nor ending.

There is also symbolism in the colors of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy; its use goes back to the Latin Church, which asked the worshipers to fast during this period of time.

The Gospel of John speaks of Christ as the true light coming into the world. In commemoration of that coming, we light candles for the four weeks leading to Christmas and reflect on the coming of Christ. It is significant that the church has always used that language—the coming of Christ—because it speaks to a deep truth. Christ is coming. Christ is always coming, always entering a troubled world, a wounded heart. And so we light the first candle, the candle of hope, and dare to express our longing for peace, for healing, and the well-being of all creation. An advent wreath is made from branches of evergreen in a circle to remind us of the never-ending grace and love of God.

As we light this first candle of Advent, we are reminded of the beginning and the ending, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.

That is the source of our hope, the reason we are filled with hopeful anticipation on this first Sunday of the church new year.

Glen and Family come forward

**All: Loving God, as we enter this Advent season,
We open all the dark places in our lives and memories to the healing light of Christ. Show us the creative power of hope.
Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you,
That we may walk in the light of Christ.**

Candle Lighting liturgy

Take time, in the busyness of this season, for quiet reflection—

For the light of God's love is everywhere.

Be surprised by wonder, and set aside time to offer thanks.

The good news of Advent is this:

Christ is coming. Christ is always coming.

Welcome Christ into our hearts. Go forth from this place in hope.

Hymn Hope is a Star VU 7 (*light One Blue Candle*)

Carol T - Scripture Reader- Isaiah 60:13,14 we find these words: "The Glory of Lebanon shall come unto you, the fir tree, the pine tree and the box together, to beautify the place of your sanctuary."

Elizabeth - The Sanctuary Evergreens

Do you wonder why today is called the "hanging of the greens service?" Or why an evergreen is called an evergreen? And why Christmas greens are traditionally used to emphasize the nativity? Green represents renewal, new life, freshness, and rebirth. Plants such as pine, fir, holly, ivy, and mistletoe are called evergreens because they do not die; through the seasons of the year, they remain ever-green. Ever-alive. It is no wonder then that we deck our sanctuary and halls with evergreens during this Advent season.

Advent is the season of preparation for the ever-coming Christ, God's gift to us of renewal and transformation.

Because the needles of the pine and fir trees appear not to die each season, the ancients saw them as signs of things that last forever. Isaiah tells us that there will be no end to the reign of the Messiah. Therefore, we hang these evergreens often shaped in a circle, which in itself has no end, to signify that the kingdom of God, to which Christ so eloquently testified, is also without end, and is realized wherever truth, justice, and peace prevail.

Among ancient Romans evergreens were also an emblem of peace, joy, and victory. The early Christians placed them in their windows to indicate that Christ had entered the home. They are ever - green, ever - alive, even in the midst of winter. They symbolize the unchanging nature of our God, and they remind us of the everlasting life that is ours through Christ Jesus.

HYMN In The Bleak Midwinter VU 55 (vs. 1,2) (*Hang swags*)

The Christmas Tree (Karen)

Today, the Christmas tree is the center of our festivities. Glittering with lights and ornaments, it is a part of the beauty and meaning of Christmas. There are several legends and stories about the Christmas tree.

The first use of the Christmas tree was in the medieval German Paradise Plays, held outdoors and portraying the creation of humankind. The Tree of Life was a fir tree decorated with apples. Later other ornaments were hung upon them, such as paper flowers and gilded nuts. In England branches or whole trees were forced into bloom indoors for Christmas. From these beginnings the use of a tree at Christmas was established. Martin Luther was perhaps the first to use a lighted tree.

The story is told that on one Christmas Eve Martin Luther wandered outdoors and became enraptured with the beauty of the starry sky. Its brilliance and loveliness led him to reflect on the glory of the first Christmas Eve as seen in Bethlehem's radiant skies. Wishing to share with his wife and children the enchantment he had felt, he cut from the forest an evergreen, glistening with snow, and took it home. He placed upon it candles to represent the glorious heavens he had seen. The use of a candle-lighted tree spread to all Europe, then America came to regard it as the central ornament of Christmas.

As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World, we light the Christmas tree. During this season of Advent, whenever you see a lighted Christmas tree, let it call to mind the One who brings light to our darkness, healing to our brokenness, and peace to all who accept it.

Carol T -Reading: John 1:1-5, 9-14

Song - O Christmas Tree

(Tree is lit and then children bring their angels to hang on the tree)

Blessing of the Christmas Tree

Loving God, we come with joy to anticipate the birth of Jesus, whose path of justice and inclusivity lights a path for all the world. May this tree, arrayed in splendor, remind us of the life-giving Christ, that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Carol T - The Christmas Poinsettia

Most Christmas greenery reflects European traditions. But one colorful plant, which looks like a flaming star, the poinsettia, is a native to the American continent. It was named after Dr. Joel Robert Poinset, an ambassador to Mexico who first introduced it to the United States in 1828. The people of Mexico and Central America call the brilliant tropical plant the "Flower of the Holy Night." The Poinsettia is a many-pointed star that has become a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem.

The legend of the poinsettia comes from Mexico. It tells of a girl named Maria and her little brother Pablo. They were very poor but always looked forward to the Christmas festival. Each year a large manger scene was set up in the village church, and the days before Christmas were filled with parades and parties. The two children loved Christmas but were always saddened because they had no money to buy presents. They especially wished that they could give something to the church for the Baby Jesus. But they had nothing.

One Christmas Eve, Maria and Pablo set out for church to attend the service. On their way they picked some weeds growing along the roadside and decided to take them as their gift to the Baby Jesus in the manger scene. Of course other children teased them when they arrived with their gift, but they said nothing for they knew they had given what they could. Maria and Pablo began placing the green plants around the manger and miraculously, the green top leaves turned into bright red petals, and soon the manger was surrounded by beautiful star-like flowers and so we see them today.

Hymn Jesus Came Bringing Us Hope MV 33 (hope, peace, love, joy) -*(Poinsettias are brought forward)*

Elizabeth - The Paraments and Advent Colors

The cycle around which our worship revolves is the church year. Today, the first Sunday in Advent, marks the beginning of a new church year.

Paraments, which cover our communion table, pulpit, and lectern, are something like drapes and curtains in a home. With the changing colors of the church year, they attract attention, add variety, and point to the significance of the season or festival being celebrated.

The traditional color for Advent is purple, a color that signifies the sacred, and spiritual fulfillment. Some traditions (like us) use blue, which represents anticipation and promise.

Both visual and performing arts have always been important ways to communicate the Christian faith. The use of music has helped believers understand their Godly hope. Other forms of visual art have been used from the beginning to help express various aspects of Christian doctrine and life.

At Advent we wait with anticipation and celebration for our coming Christ... so our hearts sing out, "O Come Emmanuel!"

Hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel VU 1 (Vs. 1,2,6,7)

Anthem "Who Would Send A Baby"

Carol T - The Nativity

One of the most heart-warming expressions of Christmas is the Nativity. The Nativity speaks of the mystery of God's wisdom. St. Francis of Assisi is often credited with the first manger scene about 800 years ago. For a people who could not read it was an effective visual aid in telling the story of the birth of Jesus. We have such a scene here. I invite the children to arrange the wise men, shepherds, animals, angels, Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus.

Why God chose to send his son into our world as a baby of humble birth, born in common surroundings, we do not know. What we do know is that God reached out to all people including the poor and wealthy, the simple and the wise, the powerless and the powerful. All who found him knelt in humility before him. Knowing God is possible because he came to us, at our level. Whenever we see a Nativity we find ourselves with Mary and Joseph; with the Shepherds, and with the Wise Men; bowing before the manger, overwhelmed by God's expression of love in coming to us.

Hymn Away in a Manger VU 69

The Gifts of Christmas (Karen)

From the beginning of Christmas celebrations, gift giving has been a part of the season. The Wise Men gave out of their treasures, and the Shepherds gave of themselves. Both express the Gift of God in giving Christ as the Savior of the World.

Unique in our history of generous givers is the story of Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in Lycia in the fourth century A.D. He is reputed to have been wealthy, his emblem being three purses and three golden balls. This was the symbol of rich Italian families of his time. It survives today in the signs of some of our pawnshops. The good Bishop gave his money away secretly to those whom he found in need. He was deeply interested in young people, giving his wealth especially to maidens whose lack of a dowry was affecting their matrimonial future, and to needy boys.

Gifts coming from unknown sources were commonly attributed to him and parents customarily gave him credit for their gifts to their children.

The discovery of his generosity is said to have been made by the father of three dowry-less daughters. The eldest two each received from the chimney on successive nights a substantial gift of gold with her name on it. The father resolved to watch and see who their generous benefactor could be. His vigil revealed the good Saint Nicholas as the donor of the gifts. His name survives today as the human embodiment of unselfish giving.

Hanging up our stockings in pleasant anticipation of Santa's gifts may have originated from the fact that the maidens of this Bishopric of Myra, needing and expecting a dowry from the good Saint Nicholas, suspended a stocking to catch the money purse the generous Bishop was sure to drop down the chimney.

Offering Come Now, O God of Peace VU 34

Pastoral Prayer and Lords Prayer

O God, the greatest gift Creation ever received came during this season of anticipation.

Throughout the next four weeks, may we develop a renewed spirit of generosity that exhibits the hope, peace, love, and joy that became incarnate in the Christ.

We pray that we may be alert to your presence in this season. Awaken our spirits.

Enrich your Church with tenderness, Lord, we may show the way of hope, joy, peace and love to all we encounter.

Enrich the leaders of our world with your wisdom, Lord, that they may bring peace and justice to all the nations

Enrich with hope those who suffer, that they may see how much you love them and that we may also be people who follow you in your understanding and compassion, Enrich our communities with your love that we may respect and appreciate one another, be united in all our diversity, and be attentive to each other's needs, we pray

Lord, Jesus Christ, you are the one who is coming to renew us and our world. Be our joy, our peace, all our hope, now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn A Light is Gleaming VU 82

Commission and Blessing

Take time, in the busyness of this season, for quiet reflection—

For the light of God's love is discernible everywhere.

Let yourselves be surprised by wonder,

And set aside time to offer quiet thanks.

The good news of Advent is this:

Christ is coming. Christ is always coming.

We will welcome Christ into our hearts.

We will let ourselves be guided by his ministry.

We will go forth from this place in hope.