

Advent 2017
Bulletin Article

Happy Thanksgiving! And happy (almost) Liturgical New Year! Advent begins next week, which is the start of our liturgical calendar! As I'm sure you know, Advent is also a time of preparation. We prepare for Christmas—not just for presents and family gatherings, though these are both wonderful things. But most importantly, we prepare for the celebration of the Incarnation—for the moment God became a human being in Jesus. While we spend most of our Advent season preparing for the holiday of Christmas, I would also encourage making this upcoming Advent season a time of preparation for the holy-day of the Incarnation by inviting Christ to be born in our hearts more completely. To help us do that, over the next 4 weeks of Advent, I will be writing reflections on our theme for this Advent season: “Christ will bring light to the world,” and looking at different ways we understand the symbol of light.

To start, I would first like to recall what a symbol is and then propose a prayer activity you can do alone or with the whole family.

According to Webster's Dictionary, a symbol is something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship or association, especially *a visible sign of something invisible* (see also Catechism #1146-1147). God uses visible symbols to point to invisible realities. All of creation is, in fact, a symbol that points to God, our Creator. What is more, our entire liturgy is composed of symbols—visible, tangible things that are meant to lift our minds to God! The light of the candle is one of the most frequently used symbols in the liturgy. We often speak of “the light of God, the light of Christ, Jesus our light.” Even our theme states as much: “Christ will bring light to the world.” But what does this actually mean? To understand it, we must first explore light as symbol.

To begin this exploration, I invite you do the following prayer exercise. Sit with a lit candle, in a dim or darkened room. Start taking turns saying the first thing that comes to mind when you look at the flame, basic word association. Then, think about what that word/thing does or is. After that, ask yourself or your prayer partners how that relates to or helps explain who God is and then ask what the implications of that are. What does your reflection on the word tell you about God and what does that mean for your life? For example, my first thought when meditating on a lit candle was hot. Thinking about what “hot” is or feels like, I thought of warmth, heat, how it kind of takes over a space and how hot particles radiate out from the heat source. How does that help me understand God? It makes me think of the story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus and how their hearts burned within them when Jesus spoke to them. There is something warm and igniting about Jesus' love and truth. It is hot. It creates heat in our hearts and, when we allow it to grow, it radiates out of us to others. This immediately made me think: Am I allowing the heat of Jesus' love to fill me and spread to others? How can I help this heat grow and spread this Advent season?

Repeat this exercise a number of times to help draw out different meanings of the symbol of candle light. I will also do this in the bulletin in the weeks to come. I hope this exercise helps you prepare for Advent and open your hearts ever more to receive the light of Christ this Christmas. Until next week!

Claire Ziolkowski
Pastoral Associate