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**Hope, Peace, Joy and Love**

*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

 *-Luke 1:78,79*

Advent is the time of waiting, but what are we usually waiting for? For presents? Parties? Santa Claus? Winter vacation from school? Travel to Grandma's house? Dinner with family? The after-Christmas sales?

The answer is yes, and no.

It’s “yes” because that's what our culture tells us Advent and Christmas is really all about.

It’s “no” because we are Christians first, and consumers second. We wait for Jesus.

The answer is yes and no because we are always pulled in these two directions. We are simultaneously Americans and Christians, just as we are simultaneously sinner and saint.

How sad that the energy and frenzy of consumerism has all but swallowed Advent, an ancient season that used to be celebrated with quietness and prayer as Christmas approached. The idea wasn't merely to wait for the birth of Jesus, but to prepare our hearts and minds through prayer and spiritual discipline.

How distressing that Christians have allowed our culture to refocus Advent into a season primarily of buying and selling. We have taken our Lord’s holiday and turned it into a marketplace. But scripture and spiritual disciplines help refocus us on what’s really important.

The above passage from Luke 1 captures the essence of Advent. Read it again. But read it slowly, as you would savor a fine chocolate with complex sweetness and luxurious texture. Go ahead. What new meanings do you discern?

You need only watch the news to know that we are, indeed, a people who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. We need the light of the dawn from on high to break upon us. We need to be guided in the way of peace.

The four weeks of Advent help bring us into the proper spirit for "the dawn from on high" that will "give light to those who sit in darkness. Advent worship is rich in symbolism.

* The paraments (cloths) that adorn the altar are deep blue, the color of the sky before dawn, when it is no longer night but not quite morning.
* With its five candles, the Advent wreath provides a visual representation of the gathering dawn. We light one candle the first week of Advent, two the second week, three the third, and four the fourth. At Christmas we light all five because the dawn of Christ has come.

Each candle and each week of Advent has a theme. Each expresses the gifts of God we have in the miracle of Christmas: Hope, Peace, Joy. Love.

Now that's worth waiting for!

*--Rob Blezard*

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