

Advent 2 Midweek - John 7:37 & 8:12

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John 7:37-38 & 8:12

³⁷ On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and called out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! ³⁸ As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from deep within the person who believes in me."

¹² When Jesus spoke to them again, he said, "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Light of the World will make us Saints in Light

The predominantly Lutheran countries of Norway and Sweden have an Advent custom or tradition on December 13, to have a young girl dress in a white dress with a red sash carrying palms and wearing a crown of wreath of candles on her head. They process through the towns with candles, lighting up the streets, and handing out cookies and singing songs.

The choice of clothing should sound familiar, since we read in Revelation 7:9: "there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing in front of the throne and of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palm branches in their hands."

The white robe symbolizes the robe of righteousness that Jesus gives to all Christians to set them apart as saints. The only difference is the red sash. The red sash symbolizes martyrdom - red being the color of blood.

But why today? What connection does this have to Christmas or Advent? The idea is that they are dressing up and remembering a very specific person who was martyred in the 3rd century A.D. during the Diocletianic or Great Persecution, which was the last and most severe persecution of the church in the Roman Empire until Constantine became the first Christian Emperor. A young girl named Lucy. History records that Lucy was martyred on or around this date in the year 304 A.D, and legend says before she was martyred she had her eyes gouged out.

Not exactly our idea of a warm fuzzy Advent or Christmas celebration. But Advent (and particularly the 2nd week in Advent) focuses us on Jesus' 2nd Coming/Advent, when He will come to call His saints home to heaven. Even if His 2nd coming doesn't come in our lifetime, Jesus can and will come at any time to call us home, through a natural death or even by martyrdom. But when He does, He will make us "share in the inheritance of the saints of light" Colossians 1:12.

The light in Advent, the Advent lights and garland that adorn our church, and the Advent candles we light here in church and in our homes remind us of this: That we will one day be among the saints in light - but not because of anything we have done, not because we are holy of ourselves, not because of anything a saint has done, but because Jesus is holy, because Jesus has made us holy, He has made us saints of light. Jesus is as He proclaimed, "the Light of the World. Whoever follows [Him] will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The custom of using light to focus on the Savior of the World predates our American customs, it predates Scandinavia, and it even predates Christmas.

The Ancient Jews had a holiday in the fall called the Festival of Tabernacles or the Festival of Booths. It was one of the “big three” festivals of the ancient church, just as we have our “big three” of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. The Festival of Tabernacles was eight days long and commemorated the time during the Exodus when God, through Moses, rescued the people from slavery in Egypt. God parted the Red Sea and led them for 40 years by a Pillar of Fire as they lived in booths or tabernacles for 40 years.

This is the context of our Gospel lesson from John. Jesus, as a faithful Jew, celebrated this Festival with his parents when He was young, and then during His earthly ministry with His disciples. Two customs were associated with this festival: For one, they would take water from the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem every morning and carry it to the Temple where they would pour the water out by the altar while repeating the words of Isaiah 12:3: “Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.’

Second, a lamp-lighting ceremony was the second major thing that occurred. Every evening of the feast, massive lamps were set up. The lamps’ light, it was said, illuminated the whole city. In the light of these lamps, there was processing, singing, and dancing all evening in celebration of God’s salvation, recalling how God had rescued their fathers from slavery and miraculously provided for them in the desert and guided them by His presence in a pillar of fire.

Water and light. Those were two of the vivid elements associated in the minds of God’s ancient people with this Festival of Tabernacles.

But we are not Jews and this week is not the Festival of Tabernacles - this is Advent.

It was no accident or coincidence that it was during this great Jewish holy week that Jesus appeared daily in the Temple teaching the people. And as the Levites poured out the water reciting the words of Isaiah, “Therefore you will draw water from the wells of salvation” there is Jesus declaring “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!” and he will receive living water.

And then, on the last and greatest day of the festival, when the great lamps were lit and there were parades and dancing with torches in praise to God, their Deliverer, Jesus stood up and declared, “I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Jesus is the fulfillment of all the hopes of Israel. He is the fulfillment of the Festival of Tabernacles because at Christmas, he came to permanently tabernacle or dwell with His people. He is the true meaning of all the rituals and sacrifices and festivals and religious practices. Jesus is the Festival. Jesus is the Tabernacle. Jesus is the Temple (Jn. 10). Jesus is the priesthood. Jesus is the altar. He is the sacrificial lamb laid upon the altar and He is the focal point of all the Hebrew prophets. He is Living Water and He is the Light of the World.

Advent and Christmas occur at the darkest time of the year. We have physical darkness reminding us of the darkness of the sin in the world. You turn on the news and all you see is sin and evil. We look at our own homes and we see sin. We look at ourselves and we find sin. We get dried out, we get parched from all the evil.

But it's in these dark days when we are parched from only hearing and seeing evil all around us, when men call evil good and good evil, God comes to us in Christ to quench our thirst and enlighten our hearts and minds.

The holy Fire who spoke to Moses in the burning bush is the same holy Fire that guided the Jews across the sea and covered Mount Sinai in smoke, and as a pillar led their way for the generation to come.

That pillar of holy Fire is the same Fire that came down from heaven miraculously when Solomon prayed at the dedication of the Temple and is the same fire that that consumed the drenched offerings of Elijah on Mt. Carmel in defiance of the priests of Baal.

That holy Fire is the same Fire that the angel used to purify the tongue of Isaiah in the temple. And that holy Fire which accompanied God's ancient people through their tribulation in the wilderness and was present with them, became fully present at Christmas.

At Christmas, that holy Fire - the Eternal God - is born into the world. He is the Light that was coming into the World (Jn 1:9).

That same presence of God now makes Himself known to you tonight in these words: "I am the light of the world."

Jesus Christ is the Light of us who dwell in darkness, who makes us, by His sacrifice to be saints in light. For someone like that young girl Lucy who was blinded and martyred, this Light is so vivid and glorious and clear that even physical blindness can't obscure it.

Every physical *and* spiritual darkness is illuminated by Jesus who is the Light of the World. Every sorrow we face, every darkness we hide, every suffering and turmoil we struggle with, even if that suffering is death by martyrdom, the tribulation we are in in this dark world - every darkness is done away with by the Light of the World, Jesus. He Himself is our salvation, the living water who brings us salvation. Through this living water, He has washed our robes and made them white with His blood.

At Jesus' Final Advent, we will be brought before the glorious throne of God. The Prophecy of Isaiah that was fulfilled by Jesus in John will be fulfilled again in Revelation. He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over us - He will tabernacle with us forever. We will never be thirsty again. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be our shepherd. He will lead us to springs of living water and God will wipe every tear away from our eyes. We will not be blinded by darkness, but we will see only heavenly Glory and eternal Light.
Amen.