



First Presbyterian Church

MOSCOW, IDAHO

Norman Fowler, Pastor November 30, 2014 10:30 a.m.

HANGING OF THE GREENS – FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.
~Psalm 62:1-2*

Introduction to Hanging of the Greens Service

We begin the Christian Year today by celebrating the Holy Season known as Advent. It is a time when we prepare ourselves for the coming of our Messiah. Advent means "Coming." We celebrate these days of Advent in expectation and preparation for Christ's arrival.

Through the centuries, Christians have observed a time of waiting and expectation before celebrating the birth of the Savior at Christmas. The Advent season is a time for reflection and preparation, but its mood is joyful. Advent proclaims the revelation of God's love as expressed in Christ's 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!

Psalm 80

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin
and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You
have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong
for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on
your name.

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-6

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? **For we observed his star at its rising**, and have come to pay him homage.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Poinsettias

Most Christmas greenery reflects European traditions. But one colorful plant, 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, which looks like a flaming star, has become a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem.

Scripture

Exodus 26:36

³⁶You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue, **purple**, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, **embroidered with needlework**.

1 Chronicles 16:28-31

²⁸Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. ²⁹Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come before him. Worship **the Lord in holy splendor**; ³⁰tremble before him, all the earth. The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. ³¹Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, “The Lord is king!”

Paraments and Banners

Visual arts have always been important ways to communicate the Christian faith and to help express various aspects of Christian doctrine and life. Colors, paraments, and banners are some of the most important visual ways Christians have used to express their faith in worship.

The embroidered hangings on the pulpit and lectern are called paraments. The colors are assigned to specific seasons in the church calendar. The green paraments are displayed during Ordinary Time, the regular days of the church year. Today, we replace the green paraments with purple, which marks seasons of preparation—Lent and Advent. In fact, our purple paraments are decorated with a Star Cross, which combines

the message of the star which announced Christ's birth with the cross representing the purpose of His life.

The banners along the walls have also been changed to reflect Advent themes, and will continue to change throughout the season.

Scripture

Hosea 14:4-9

I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.

⁵I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon. ⁶His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon. ⁷They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

⁸O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. **I am like an evergreen cypress**; your faithfulness comes from me. ⁹Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

Evergreens: Wreaths

The most striking and the most universal feature of Christmas is the use of evergreens in churches and homes. Among ancient Romans evergreens were an emblem of peace, joy, and victory. The early Christians placed them in their windows to indicate that Christ had entered the home. Holly and ivy, along with pine, and fir are called evergreens because they never change color. 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.

Under Christian thought and sentiment, holly became widely used in church celebrations. Holly was considered as the burning bush, or a symbol of Mary whose being glows with the Holy Spirit. The red berries represented the blood drops from the cruel thorns in the crown of Jesus.

In Isaiah 60:13 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."

Scripture

Psalm 92:12-15

²The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a **cedar in Lebanon**.

¹³They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.

¹⁴In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap,
¹⁵showing that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Isaiah 44:21-24

²¹Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. ²²I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you. ²³Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; **break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!** For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. ²⁴Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth;

Christmas Tree

Today, the Christmas tree is the center of our festivities. Glittering with lights and ornaments, this evergreen 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. After observing the beauty of the starry sky, he placed candles upon the Christmas tree 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.

Scripture

Hebrews 9:6-10

Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties; ⁷but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.

⁸By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing. ⁹This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.

Mark 12:28-34

⁸One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” ²⁹Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³²Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; ³³and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Chrismons: Symbols of Faith

Chrismons ornaments were originated and first made for use on the Christmas tree of Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia, in 1957 by Mrs. Frances Kipps Spencer, a church member. She coined the word “Chrismons” – a combination of “Christ” and “monograms.” The designs were monograms of and symbols for our Lord Jesus Christ. Because these designs have been used by his followers since biblical times, they are the heritage of all Christians and serve to remind each of us, regardless of denomination, of the One we follow. All Chrismons ornaments are made in a combination of white and gold, to symbolize the purity and majesty of the Son of God and the Son of Man. Mrs. Spencer stated a tree was never finished until someone came to see it and have the story of Christ explained to them through the ornaments.

(from the Ascension Lutheran Church website—they hold the copyright on the word “Chrismons.”)



[See attached for examples of various Chrismons displayed on our tree.]

Scripture

Psalm 130:5-8

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Advent Candles

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 flame of each new candle reminds us that something is happening, and something more is still to come.

A reading from Mark 13:33-37:

³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

The candles are arranged in a circle to remind us of the continuous power of God, which knows neither beginning nor ending. There is also symbolism in the colors of the candles. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. He is coming as the King of Kings as well as the Prince of Peace. The pink candle represents joy. The large white candle in the center is known as the Christ candle, and points to Jesus as the Christ, the Light of the world.

A progression is noted in the lighting of the candles of the Advent wreath each Sunday. Each candle symbolizes various aspects of our waiting experience. For us this year we are focusing on four ideas of the Christmas event: Watch, Prepare, Behold, Rejoice. The culmination of the season comes as we light the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve. We join in rejoicing that the promise of long ago has been fulfilled.

This morning, we light the first candle as we begin to watch for the coming of Christ.

Song

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

O come, O come, Emmanuel, And Ransom Captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel!

Words by John M. Neale. Music by Thomas Helmore. Public domain.

Chrismons

The tradition of the Chrismon Tree began in Virginia in 1957. Chrismons are monograms of Christ and other symbols of Christianity. These symbols from Christian history tell the story of God's plan for our salvation through Jesus Christ. The hand-crafted Chrismons on the tree are white and gold to symbolize purity and perfection, majesty and glory. Nearly all our Chrismons were made by women of our church.

MONOGRAMS

The earliest monograms for our Lord were Greek letters.



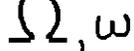
Chi, the first letter of Christus, the Greek word for Christ.



Chi Rho, the first two letters of Christus. A line above the letters indicates that they form an abbreviation. The letters are often superimposed to make a more interesting design.



Chi Rho, with the Chi (X) turned to form a cross. This is called the "Cross of Constantine," the Roman emperor who ended the persecution of Christians in 312 A.D. after he saw a Chi Rho in a vision.



Alpha and Omega. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet signify the beginning and the end. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Revelation 22:13)



Iota Chi, the first letters of the Greek words for Jesus Christ.



Iota Eta Sigma, the first three letters of Iesus, the Greek word for Jesus. (Both C and S are forms of the Greek letter Sigma.) The meaning of this monogram was Latinized to "In hoc sigma" (in this sign) or "Iesus Hominum Salvdor" (Jesus, Savior of Mankind), but the original meaning was "Jesus."

CIRCLE



A **circle** symbolizes eternity and perfection.

CROSSES

Crosses are universally recognized symbols of Christianity, reminding us of the glory of the resurrection.

 **Latin cross** – the lower arm is longer than the other three. This is the form of the cross on which Christ was crucified.

 **Greek cross** – all arms are the same length.

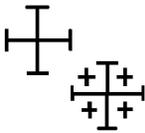
 **Saltire cross** – diagonal cross, also known as St. Andrew's cross.

 **Tau cross** – shaped like the letter T, this old Egyptian cross is called the cross of prophecy.

Many ornamental variations of the basic crosses are used in Christian art.

 **Celtic cross** – Latin cross with the circle of eternity around the arms. This cross is used frequently in the Presbyterian Church.

 **Ankh** – an ancient Egyptian symbol for life, formed with the Tau cross and a circle. In Christian art it retains its meaning of life and regeneration.

 **Jerusalem or Crusaders' cross** – This cross is formed with four Tau crosses. It is often combined with four small crosses to indicate that Christ's followers have taken His word to the four corners of the world.

 **Cross Crosslet** – This cross is formed with four Latin crosses.

 **Maltese cross** – 8-pointed.  **Patee cross** – arms curve outward

 **Cross triumphant** – The cross above a banded sphere symbolizes that the cross (Christianity) has been victorious over the world.

Disguised crosses were used by early Christians in times of persecution.

 **Shepherd's crook**

 **Anchor of hope**

TRINITY

Three-part designs symbolize the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Equilateral triangle



Trefoil, shamrock



Entwined circles and Triquetra – Interwoven designs show the indivisibility of the Holy Trinity.



Trefoil and triangle



Fleur-de-lys

STARS

The sun and the stars were images used by the prophets who foretold the coming of Christ. A star led the wise men to the baby Jesus. Our Lord said, “I am the bright morning star” and “I am the light of the world.”



4-point star – a **star cross**, combining symbolism of the nativity and resurrection.



5-point star – symbolizes **Epiphany**, the coming of the wise men, which was the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.

6-point star – the Creator’s star



Star of David



Iota Chi



A 6-point star design often looks like a **snowflake**. This is also an appropriate symbol, meaning purity and the satisfaction of spiritual thirst.



7-point star – combines the Godly number 3 with the earthly number 4 (four seasons, four corners of the earth). It also symbolizes the seven **gifts of the spirit** (Isaiah 11:2 and Rev. 5:12).

8-point star – regeneration, baptism.



Chi and cross – An ancient mystical 8-point star symbol drawn with a continuous line was adopted by the early Christians because it contained Chi Rho monograms and crosses.



The many-pointed **Sun of Righteousness** symbolizes Christ as prophesied in Malachi 4:2.

FISH



Early followers of Jesus used the sign of the **fish** to identify themselves to one another. Jesus had called his disciples to be “fishers of men” and He fed a multitude with five fishes. The letters in the Greek word for fish are the initial letters of the Greek words for “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.”

OTHER SYMBOLS

Butterfly – resurrection
Crown – King of kings
Shield – armor of faith

Rose – nativity, humanity of Jesus
Dove – Holy Spirit
Vine – Jesus said, “I am the vine and you are the branches.”

Many of the symbols on the Chrismon tree were used in the stained glass windows and the carvings, tiles, and painted decorations throughout the church.

May the Chrismon symbols add to your joy this Christmas season, as they remind you of God’s greatest gift, Jesus Christ.

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