

The past couple of weeks, I've had a number of discussions about the different colors associated in the church. Why do we change out the paraments all of the time? Which colors are supposed to be with which season? And the most common question I have this time of year is, why is the joy candle pink and not the love candle? So, I wanted to take this opportunity to talk about some of the meaning behind these colors and symbols.

Generally speaking, when you think about Christmas in a commercial setting at least, the two colors that you primarily identify with the season are red and green. But in a religious setting, the colors are more often purple or blue with silver and gold. If you look around the sanctuary, I think it is safe to say that we have a lot more blue than we do red.

Green

Green is clearly a significant color around the Christmas season. Hopefully if you have a live tree or wreath it is still green and not brown. And that is why green is a significant color. It symbolizes life.

In many of our traditions, they come from other traditions and are transferred. In this case, as the various pagan groups started to adopt Christianity, they continued some of their pagan rituals. They would bring fresh cut ivy, holly, or evergreens into their houses during winter, because these types of plants could survive the harsh conditions. Eventually, the pointy needles and leaves would become associated with the crown of thorns.

The advent wreath is one of the most commonly associated symbols for the advent season. The wreath is a symbol of anticipation for his birth. But, we can break it down and see so many other symbols embedded within it. In this case, the green wreath or circle symbolizes continuous life and needles also represent his crown.

Red

Red is a common symbol in Christianity, it symbolizes the blood of Christ. The blood that he spilled so that our sins would be forgiven. We are reminded of this every month in communion.

In combining the red and green, holly becomes a great symbol for Christmas. The green plant can withstand the harshness of winter and symbolize life, then the pointy leaves represent his crown, and the red berries represent the blood that he spilled. His life is rolled up into one plant.

Blue/Purple

Blue is clearly a significant color in our decorating choices. We use it for our paraments, our banners, and 3 of the advent candles. In the past we have used purple during the Advent season. Many churches continue to use purple during this time.

The two colors can be used almost interchangeably. They both represent prayer, reflection, penance, and sacrifice. The two colors are also used to symbolize royalty and the arrival of the newborn king.

Blue, however, takes the symbols a little further. Blue also symbolizes hope which is one of our advent candles. Peace and love are considered to be emotions and understanding with God brought out by reflection. Whereas hope is considered to be brought about by communication with God and is more unflinching than others.

Blue is also used to represent the night sky, the beginning of creation, tranquility, and the Virgin Mary. If you notice, in most representations of Mary, she is wearing blue. This is to show her nobility, tranquility, and her place at the beginning of creation.

Pink/Rose

Today's candle is the joy candle. We represent it on the wreath as pink or rose to stand out from the other three candles. Pink represents joy because it is a spontaneous reaction. We do not sit back and think that we will be joyful about something. It is a spontaneous guttural reaction.

The candle is to remind us of the joy the shepherds had when the angels came to them and told them about Jesus' birth. It is to remind us about our joy as we share his coming. Whether it is giving or receiving Christmas cards or presents, or just saying Merry Christmas to someone as we pass them on the street. It is a joy that is incomparable.

White

White is used to symbolize Christ's purity, holiness, and light. Seeing the reminders of purity and holiness with white, I think, is pretty easy for us to do while sitting in the sanctuary or at home. But, I feel that sometimes we lose sight about the light.

In Sunday School and Confirmation, we talk about bringing in God's light. And we bring it in like we do every week for church service. We know that it is a symbol for us to reflect about God's wisdom and grace. It is a symbol of our covenant with God.

In today's reading from Isaiah, he talks about God's light. He reminds us that God has taken us and protects us. His light is to open our eyes and remove us from the darkness. His covenant will always protect us now and forever.

When we bring the light in, we are to be reminded of this covenant. When we light each advent candle we are reminded about how his influence guides us and each candle. We have shared hope and peace. Today we share joy. And next week we will share his love.

I want you to picture yourself in a closed room in a building. And in this room, you have a light. The rest of the building, for whatever reason, doesn't have any power. Someone comes to your room and knocks. They ask you to open your door and share the light so that others can see. Your light has the ability to help others.

Light in an empty closed room doesn't help anyone. It needs to be shared. Light benefits all who use it. It is something that we all have inside of us and that we can all share with others. We can choose to be in the closed room or we can share the light.

Amen