

PARACLETE

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The Incarnation: The Advent of Perfection

By Dr. Don Bierle, FaithSearch President

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God..." (Luke 1:35-38).

Jesus is "the image of the invisible God... For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 1:15; 2:9).

Thanksgiving Anticipates Advent

Thanksgiving may come first in our calendar today, but Christmas gives it its fullest meaning. Therefore, it is appropriate that Christians gathering for Thanksgiving would anticipate celebrating the advent of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Churches and Christian families do so with a centuries-old Christian tradition called the **Advent wreath**. It consists of a wreath with four candles in a circle around a fifth larger candle in the center. One candle is lit each week of Advent (this year on December 1, 8, 15, and 22), symbolizing the lighted path which leads to the ultimate spiritual light of the world. The birth of the Savior Jesus Christ is represented by the fifth candle, which is lit on Christmas eve.



"A representation of The Annunciation to Mary, by Luca Giordano, ca. 1672 (public domain).

The four candles represent the virtues which Jesus brings: **hope, peace, joy, and love**, in that order. The first, second, and fourth candles are purple, the primary color of Advent symbolizing royalty. The third candle is pink, the liturgical color for joy. The larger center candle, symbolizing Jesus' birth, is white for purity or perfection.

Candle One: HOPE

Sometimes called the "Prophecy Candle," it points to **the long line of God's promises** to redeem us from our sin and death into the glorious eternity He has prepared for His children. Isaiah prophesied, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light... For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us" (9:2, 6). Luke's Gospel revealed the prophecy's significance: "...for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord" (2:11).

Candle Two: PEACE

Often called the "Bethlehem Candle," the second Advent candle reminds us

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Has the World Forgotten?

When God created us, He "created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27, emphasis added). He then initiated the first **marriage** (2:24) and the **family** (4:1-2). At our creation, God also included a command: "... Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." (1:28). **Have we forgotten?**

Japan made news recently when its government initiated a **dating and marriage app to create couples**. Why? The number of marriages and the birth rate are at an all-time low. In fact, the current birth rate of 1.2 per woman is well below that which is needed (2.1) to sustain the population. The Japanese government realizes that history indicates that if not corrected, they are a nation in decline.



The people of Japan are hardly alone. China's birth rate is at 1.15; Italy at 1.3; Germany and Norway each at 1.5; Australia and the UK 1.6; Iran 1.7; Latin America 1.8; and India 2.0. The lowest is Taiwan at 1.1 and the highest is Niger at 6.7. The more developed countries average 1.5 and the least developed average 3.8. Israel at 2.9 and the Arab states at 3.0 are exceptions. The global birth rate average has declined from 5.0 in 1950, to 2.3 in 2021.

The United States of America? In 2023, we had the lowest birth rate in our history – 1.62, well below population replacement (2.1). God

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of **Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem** and anticipation of their first-born Son. Isaiah identified the significance, *"And His name will be called... Prince of Peace..."* Furthermore, Isaiah extended the promise, *"There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace... from then on and forevermore"* (9:6-7). The destruction caused by sin may be manifest now, but Jesus is coming again, and so is His kingdom of peace (John 14:27; 16:33).

Candle Three: JOY

As we come closer to Christmas eve, **our joy grows more and more**. Even the angel who brought the message from God so many years ago was excited, *"...I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people..."* (Luke 2:10). The third candle takes us back to the joyful anticipation of the shepherds who went to see Jesus in Bethlehem, thus it is often referred to as the "Shepherds' Candle."

The Psalmist anticipates our own response: *"Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms"* (95:2).



"Adoration of the Shepherds" by Jacopo dal Ponte, ca. 1548 (public domain).

Candle Four: LOVE

The circular shape of the Advent wreath symbolizes God's infinite love for us. That is why the fourth candle, called the "Angel's candle," points to **the true Light of the world, Jesus**. The apostle John affirmed that God's love is manifested in Jesus, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..."* (John 3:16), and *"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us..."* (1 John 3:16).

Candle Five: JESUS

Science has identified the electromagnetic spectrum which includes all the colors of the visible portion of light, from red to violet. The candles are purple and pink because they reflect only

that portion of the visible spectrum, symbolically reflecting only hope, peace, joy, or love.



In contrast, **the white candle reflects them all, the "light" of the entire spectrum**. Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world, he who follows Me... shall have the light of life"* (John 8:12). In Jesus, we can have it all - hope, peace, joy, and love. Indeed, confessing our sin and professing our faith in Him, God's Word declares an amazing truth,

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach (Colossians 1:21-22).

Feast your soul on His perfection—and ours, by His grace—this Thanksgiving and Christmas! 

FOR REFLECTION


Thanksgiving: Stimulating Good Thoughts and Actions

A heart giving thanks at any given moment is the real test of the extent to which we love God. Love must carry with it a 'thank you' to God.

—Francis Schaeffer

How is your contentment this Thanksgiving?

A Hebrew word for praise is *"halal"* from which we get the "Hallel Psalms" (113-118). It is instructive to note that "thanks" occurs there as frequently, or even more than the word "praise," especially in Psalm 118. Furthermore, our praise word *"hallelujah"* combines *"halal"* and *"Yah"* [the shortened form of God's name Yahweh] meaning "Let us praise YAH." This is retained by the KJV and Jerusalem translations of Psalm 68:4: *"Sing to God, sing praises to His name...by His name YAH, and rejoice before Him."* Most other translations miss this hallelujah connection by substituting "Lord" for YAH.

The sacrifice we are to offer God this Thanksgiving is not an ox or a bull (or a "turkey"!) on a temple altar, but *"the fruit of our lips"* (Hosea 14:2; "our lips as bulls" in the Masoretic Text, the authoritative text of the Hebrew Bible). The Psalmist says, *"...magnify Him with thanksgiving, and it will please the Lord better than an ox"* (Psalm 78:30-31). 


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created the family as the healthy environment for raising children and maintaining a society. The number of new marriages each year is declining, and only about half of Americans are married, down from 72% in 1960. [Singleness for some may be God's gift, see 1 Corinthians 7:7-9.] Only 20% of Americans get married before age 30. The percentage of mid-life adults who have never married has increased from 16.8% in 2000, to 29.1% in 2021.

The U.S. recorded 3.6 million live births in 2023, but over one million additional babies didn't make it due to abortion – 73,000,000 didn't make it world-wide! We are a world civilization in decline. **Have we forgotten the dignity of motherhood and fatherhood, and of life?** Remembering that God is the Creator of those in the womb would go a long way toward solving the decline of nations across the globe:

For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance...the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them (Psalm 139:13-16).

Pray that the awe and accountability of parenthood would be restored to hearts in America and around the world! 

Source: "Japan," *World Magazine*, July 2024, p. 23.
Web searches for stats.

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