

Steve's November United

In my family growing up Advent was a huge part of our Christmas preparation. It started with a "Hanging of the Greens" festival at church where there was a huge all church potluck, decorations and crafts for the kids. I remember one year we made a family advent wreath. It was a circle of pine boughs with four candles embedded in it. Every Sunday night my family gathered around the Advent wreath where we read the scripture passage for the evening and lit a candle and said a prayer. It was probably a hassle to get all six of us kids around the table, but it was a memory that has stayed with me my whole life.

What do you do for Advent? Most people blow by Advent getting an early start on Christmas. And I do agree we need to get ready for Christmas. I'm all about celebrating Winter Fest. Lights, decorations, wreaths, presents, parties, and special meals. But we also need to celebrate Advent.

Advent is decidedly Christian. While Winterfest is a secular celebration. The four Sundays of Advent have long been a part of the Christian preparation for the birth of Jesus.

Traditionally Advent is a mini-Lent. It's designed for introspection, reflection, and self-sacrifice. Fasting and spiritual disciplines are a way to engage Advent.

But it's more than just sacrifice in Advent. It's a time of longing for a new day where the presence of Christ is born anew into each person's life. This year the names we're using for each of the four Sundays comes from this book we're studying, "We Make the Road by Walking" by Brian McLaren. The Sundays are hope, surprise, love and inclusion.

I believe this year more than any other year we need to celebrate both Advent and Winterfest. With the Coronavirus weighing down on all of our lives, we need to have fun, decorate, and enjoy Winterfest. Go buy presents, string lights, and decorate the tree. Sing songs and have a great time. Don't allow the pandemic to ruin the holiday.

This year we also need Advent. We need to reflect upon how God works in amazing ways in our lives. In the midst of the darkness of the virus the candlelight of Advent reminds us that God's light shines. We can sit and reflect and remember the hundreds of thousands who have lost their lives and the grieving families left behind. But just as Easter comes at the end of Lent, we remember that Christmas Day comes at the end of Advent. This month allows us to remember there is always the birth of hope waiting at the end of our darkness.

Have a happy Winterfest!
But also have a meaningful Advent!
Steve