

Smoky Mountain Reflections
Advent #2

(Warning: German contained in the following sentence:) Advent, Advent, ein Lichtlein brennt. Erst eins, dann zwei, dann drei, dann vier. dann steht das Christkind vor der Tür. Translation: Advent, Advent, one candle burns. First one, then two, then three, then four. Then stands the Christ child before the door. Translation is not one of my better skills, so I will claim poetic license in my translation. This is a poem that is often heard about this time of year in Bavaria. It really is quite a nice poem and harkens back to the region's strong Christian heritage. Bavarian children do not see the Christmas tree in their home until Christmas Eve. The ringing of a small bell signifies that the Christ kindl or engel (Christ child or angel) has delivered the tree, the decorations and all the presents. Their living room has been transformed into a small haven where the family gathers around the solemn occasion commemorating the birth of the Christ child. Then typically before any festivities... Silent night is sung. These are wonderful cultural traditions that bring Christ to the center of the Christmas experience. All the candles on the Advent wreath are lit. The warm glow of candle light fills the room as children read the Bethlehem account, and Christmas hymns round out the experience. The sights, smells and sounds of Christmas and its importance fill the hearts and minds of all who gather for this grand family event.

The retailers bypassed Halloween & Thanksgiving this year and kicked off the Christmas shopping before fall even arrived. The full commercialization of Christmas on an American scale has never taken a complete foothold in the European culture. But there is a sad reality in the backdrop of this beautiful cultural story. Europe with its rich Christian heritage is referred to by most experts today as a post Christian society. By some estimates, less than 5% of Europe's population attends church on a regular basis. Why do I share this sad truth with you at such a joyous time of anticipation? As we prepare for Christmas during this Advent season, we should keep all of God's creation in our prayers. There are some scary similarities between the America of today and the Europe of only 20 or 30 years ago. If you look at Europe's church attendance numbers from the 1950's, you will find over 50% attended church regularly. Currently a little over 50% of Americans claim to attend church somewhat regularly if you include the CME's (Christmas, Mother's Day & Easter). The actual numbers float under less than 20% of Americans attend church on any given Sunday. But we, like Europe, are on the decline and reasons for the decline are many and various. However, we need not fret over these sad truths—just be aware and pray about them. And remember that God is in charge.

Advent is a time of preparation, Make time in your busy schedule to attend this year. As we venture back in time to celebrate the birth of our Lord and savior. As you prepare your hearts during this blessed Advent season, make use of some form of daily devotions. It will enrich your Advent experience. During your daily devotion, pray that your family, your friends, your neighbors, our fellow citizens, and people of all nations, who don't know and who linger in darkness, that the scales which block faith would fall from their eyes and they would be blessed with the promise that the Christ child came to fulfill, and be filled with the assurance of eternal salvation that only faith in the promised Christ Child can provide.

For anyone who reads this reflection outside of a certain understanding of your eternal existence, I invite you specially to receive this Christmas, the gift that the Christ child came to give you.

In Christ, Pastor Portier