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## **The Advent Wreath**

There are many traditions surrounding the advent wreath but the origin of the advent wreath that most resonates with my childhood is that of a 19<sup>th</sup> century German pastor by the name of Johann Wichern. Pastor Wichern was known for his mission work among the poor, especially the poor. Wichern founded a mission school in Hamburg named the Rauhes Haus and in 1839 he came up with an invention that was based on the children's daily question, "Is today Christmas?" Pastor Wichern built a large wooden ring out of an old wagon wheel. He drilled holes for small red candles and then four larger hole for four big white candles. Every day of the week on Monday thru Saturday a red candle was lit, and on Sunday one of the big white candles was lit. In this way the children were able to count down the days until Christmas. History shows that soon after Wichern's invention many Protestant churches and later Roman Catholic churches began to incorporate some version of this tradition.

Thinking back to my childhood I can completely resonate with the children of Rauhes Haus. The anticipation of Christmas was like no other feeling I encountered during the rest of the year. I am quite sure my mother and father were appreciative of the upcoming celebration as it was much easier getting me to do my chores. The advent wreath was a part of my family's tradition and I have wonderful memories of helping my mother cut and gather evergreen boughs and pine cones. I did not know back then but I have come to know that pine boughs are used to signify the hope of eternal life brought by Jesus Christ. The candles themselves signify the light of God coming into the world in the birth of Jesus. Throughout the year my family would turn off the television and gather for evening devotions. We would read our daily lesson from our devotional the Portals of Prayer and the Bible reading that went with that day's devotion. I have especially fond memories of our devotions during advent as we would turn all of the house lights off and my father would read by the light of the candle(s) from the advent wreath. I can still see my parents faces in the glow of the candlelight as together we prayed the Lord's Prayer.

Advent is a time of preparation and reflection as we patiently wait for the celebration of God's greatest gift to the world. The tradition of the advent wreath is just one way to help us prepare for Christmas. May this season bring you hope, joy, peace, and love. Four of God's wonderful gifts that are represented by the four advent candles.

Blessings, Pastor Bill