

MORAVIAN MOMENT # 98 Celebrating Christmas-Moravian style

Moravians world wide heralds the birth of Christ in several pictorial and symbolic ways. In using symbolism, the Moravian Church seeks to bring and tell the Christmas story in a dynamic way, which even the youngest child, can understand. It is portrayed in such a way that the miraculous message of Christmas would never be lost in the midst of the commercialization of it.

First of all, there is the PUTZ, a German word meaning decoration. In its simplest form, the Putz is a reminder of the Manger scene in the stable of Bethlehem. The idea is to reconstruct the scene where it is recorded in scripture that Jesus was born. All of the figures recorded in the Nativity story are placed there to tell the story without words. It is felt that the idea came from the Church of the Middle Ages, when Priests placed figures of the Holy Family in the Churches so that their illiterate or unlettered members might get a clearer idea of the Christmas story.

The Moravian Star is generally hung in the Sanctuary and in the homes of Moravians, beginning the first Sunday of Advent through to Epiphany, January 6. It is a lighted star, shining to proclaiming the message that Jesus is the light of the world. The message is clear. Advent heralds his impending entry into the world on a rescue mission, to save the world. The Prophet Isaiah puts it best when he says, "**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you**". (Isaiah. 60:1-2). It is not known who invented the Moravian Star, however, there is the strong belief that it originated in the evening handicraft sessions at the paedagogium, or school, in Niesky, Germany, about 1850.

Another custom borrowed from other denominations is the Advent Wreath. Four candles are arranged in a wreath of greenery, and often a fifth one is in the centre. On each of the four Sundays in Advent, a candle is lit, so that by the fourth Sunday, four candles are burning brightly. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas day, along with the other four. The centre candle lit on Christmas day is the Christ child. As we prepare for Christmas, the first four candles stand for hope, peace, joy and love.

A tradition that is popular in the British Province is the Christingle. This is a Christmas service where lighted candles are placed in oranges and distributed to the worshippers. The orange symbolizes the round world, and the candle is the Christ child, the light of the world come on this day.

The deep spiritual value of the Christmas festival is that it celebrates the greatest miracle of all ages, when God became incarnate. Have a most blessed Christmas and may God in Christ reign in your heart and life.

21st December, 2008