

Moravian Moment #49... The PUTZ and its significance

Having looked at the Advent Star and its significance and relevance for our faith, we now look at the PUTZ (pronounced PUTS). The German word PUTZ simply means decoration. The idea came from the Church of the Middle ages, when Priests placed figures of the Holy Family in Churches so that their illiterate members might get a clearer idea of the Christmas story. The Moravian Missionaries took the scene with them wherever they went to make sure that the story would never be lost.

In its simplest form the PUTZ is a reminder of the manger scene in Bethlehem. The nativity figures form the centre of the PUTZ. Other items are often added, such as the sheep on the hillside, or the approaching Wise Men. The Putz may be on the floor at the foot of a decorated Christmas tree; or it may be on a small table with only a bit of evergreen as a background. Always its purpose is to tell the story of the first Christmas in Bethlehem in Judea.

Another custom that has developed in the Moravian Church is the Advent Wreath. This custom is one that is borrowed from other denominations. Four candles are arranged in a wreath of greenery, and often a fifth one in the centre. On each Sunday of Advent, the appropriate number of candles is lit, one on the first Sunday, two on the second Sunday, three on the third Sunday and four on the fourth Sunday of Advent. The centre candle is lit on Christmas day, signifying that the true light has come, that the Word becomes flesh in Jesus Christ. The meaning of the candles vary in many traditions, but for the Moravians they stand for HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE, which are all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. As we celebrate Christmas, let us remind ourselves that the emphasis should be on the love of Jesus, which led him to come as the babe of Bethlehem, prepared to atone for humanity.

Christmas stresses the light which came into the world with the birth of Christ and the response which every Christian should make by witnessing for Him.

One tradition that is popular in the British Province of the Moravian Church is the Christingle. At Christmas, oranges are topped by lighted candles and distributed to the children. The orange symbolizes the round world, and the candle is the Christ child, the light of the world come on this day. The Christmas festival therefore celebrates the greatest miracle of all ages, when God became incarnate.

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