

## *Year B Advent III*

---

*These Teaching Tips are not Scripture commentaries, but rather brief pointers for avoiding unintended anti-Jewish bias and for highlighting positive observations about Judaism which might otherwise go unnoticed.*

### **Advent and Light/Darkness**

*A man came, sent by God. His name was John. . . .  
He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.'  
(John 1:6-8, 19-28).*

In John's Gospel, Jesus is presented as 'the Light of the world' (John 8:12; 9:15). The light versus darkness theme sets up a contrast between the darkness of ignorance, sin and rejection of God's ways on the one hand, and Jesus who brings enlightenment on the other. The light of Christ reveals the true path, and illuminates the way for those who stumble, or who have lost their way.

The dark/light imagery is an obvious theme to be unpacked by homilists and teachers. Take care, however, that this powerful imagery contrasting light and darkness be not misconstrued to suggest that Judaism was a 'dark', moribund religion of faithless people; and that Christ ('the Light') was the opposite of Judaism.

Recall the instruction of the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews that:

The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbour (cf. Dt 6:5, Lv 19:18, Mt 22:34-40). [*Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration 'Nostra Aetate' (n. 4), 1974, part III*]

On the contrary, our Saviour emerged historically in a dynamic and complex Jewish society where religious, cultural, and political ideas were debated and jostled for space. It was a fruitful, innovative, as well as difficult and dangerous time in the history of the Jewish people. In affirming the Christian belief that Jesus is the 'Light', then this illumination also reflects that of Israel, elected by God as a 'light unto the nations' (Isa 49:6), from whom our Saviour came, was formed, and from whose Scriptures and traditions he taught.

Indeed, one can sense the 'light' of the Jewish people in the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* where, quoting St Paul, the Council fathers declare:

*'The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary.'* (NA, 4)

See also: 'December Lights' below.

## December lights: Hanukkah, Advent, Christmas

*The Advent season is an opportune time to educate Catholics in an appreciation of the Jewish Festival of Hanukkah which falls in the month of December, and to highlight interfaith connections. Suggestions follow. Homiletic comments need to be timed accordingly with the dates of Hanukkah in any given year.*

---

In the final weeks of the calendar year, both Christians and Jews light candles.

After four weeks of lighting the candles of the Advent wreath, Christians light the Christ-candle to welcome the Christ-child and to celebrate the mystery of God-with-us.

Around the same time of year, in the month of December, Jewish families commence the eight-day festival of Hanukkah (see notes below). Each evening of those eight days, at sundown, they light another candle of the Hanukkah menorah.

### *Different candles, but the source of the light is the same.*

Christians and Jews light candles, for different reasons, as part of very different festivals. Even so, those beacons of light intertwine with our respective convictions of hope: of faith in a light that shines amidst darkness, of joy in a miracle, of trust in the living God who saves and liberates, who does not forget a faithful people, and who performs wonders on their behalf.

As we Christians light candles at this time of year, let us call to mind:

- Jewish families lighting the Hanukkah menorah;
- the gift of Jewish covenantal life (then and now);
- the Jewish ancestry of this miracle-child, Jesus;
- and the miracle of salvation as we understand it in our own Christian lives.

### **In the candlelight of Hanukkah**

---

**History & Tradition.** Hanukkah extends for eight days and it recalls the re-dedication of the Temple after the Maccabean uprising (2nd century BCE). The Christian Bible, in the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees, tells the story of how a powerful Greek Hellenistic culture tried to violently suppress the faith and traditions of the Jewish people. It tells of the Maccabean resistance and of heroic martyrs: Jews who accepted death rather than renounce their faith.

**Miracle.** According to tradition, when the Maccabeans reclaimed the Temple and lit the menorah (lampstand), a miracle occurred: the menorah stayed alight for eight days even though there was only enough oil for one day.

**Renewal.** Hanukkah means 'dedication'. Just as the Temple was re-dedicated in ancient times, contemporary Judaism views Hanukkah as a time for spiritual re-dedication and renewal of lives.

**Hope.** In the miracle of the cruse of oil, Jewish commentators note the courage of the Maccabees to light the menorah in the first place. With only a small portion of oil that would not last beyond one day... why attempt lighting the menorah? The miracle was born of hope against all odds.

**Witness.** During Advent and Christmas, we Christians might ponder the idea that were it not for the reality of what Hanukkah represents, had not the Jewish people prevailed in the face of forces bent on their destruction, there would be no Jewish communities to carry on the traditions of their faith; there would be no child Jesus born and raised in the teachings of the Torah. There would be no Christmas.