

## The Fourth Week of Advent-Peace

### A Tale of Two Houses

By Mary Foy

For the fourth and final week of Advent, we return to lighting a purple candle. It is not that the joy of last week is gone, but we take this week to look ahead and see what we may not have now, but that for which humankind has searched for all of time: peace.

We have lived on our street for over twenty years, and most of our neighbors have been here at least that long. Some houses are owned by second or even third generations of the same family. We are friendly to each other, but it's not that kind of street when folks drop into each other's houses or invite each other to barbecues or anything like that. We all just work and raise our families and do what we can to keep our yards neat and the sidewalks clear when it snows.

Apart from the challenges and stressors of the pandemic, 2020 was also marked by a very contentious presidential race, which further divided and isolated people and even families. There was one side, and the other, and no in between, it appeared.

And our little neighborhood was not exempt. We have never been a really political group, not many lawn signs around election time or anything like that. But this year was different.

There was one house on the northern side of the street that was decked out last summer with flags, signs, and banners touting their choice for winner of the election. They even had a box with literature in the yard so that interested people could get more info. It was certainly something new for our block.

And there was a house on the southern side who went just as "all in" for their choice, complete with decals and messages on their cars and spray-painted plywood sheets attached to their fence. They had a speaker that implored the listener to look deeper into their selected candidate.

The waves from the cars in the morning had ceased. There was no more bringing in of the neighbor's recycling cans on windy days or hand delivery of misplaced mail. The battle lines were drawn and were not to be crossed.

As fall moved in, the battle heated up, with each house adding more and more "decorations" to upstage the other. By election day, you could hardly see the front doors or windows.

After the election, the materials stayed up for a while, but began to decrease as the results began to be finalized. By the weekend after Thanksgiving, almost everything was gone and the two houses, and the rest of the neighborhood, moved forward with putting out the Christmas decorations.

The northern house usually got things started. They had young men in the family who owned a tall ladder and had no fear about using it. In no time, their house was festooned with sparking icicle lights and multicolored bulbs.

The southern house began with their "country Christmas" theme with rustic decorated wooded sleds and cutouts of snowmen, reindeer, and elves. By the time they were finished, their gingerbread cottage was all set for the holidays.

Without a word, the neighbors stood on their front lawns looking at each other's handiwork. Then, the tall ladder was carried by the two strong young men over to the gingerbread house, and silently, they began to string the neighbors' clear lights over the eaves of the house. The brightly lit house found wooded toy soldiers in the yard and huge gingham bows on the front railings.

Both neighbors stood in each other's front yards, and wide smiles were all around. Phones snapped pictures of the decorations, and discussions began on what could be added when all the decorations were on clearance at Target.

In that afternoon, peace came to both those houses, and to our street, and our neighborhood. It came to a part of our town and our state, and part of our country, albeit a small part.

But isn't this how peace begins everywhere: with one person, then another, then another? This last week of Advent, this Christmas time, let us think of how we can begin this chain of peace and fellowship in our world, no matter what our neighbors are doing. Peace is a wish for our future, but it can also be a job for our present. As the song says, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." ("Let there be Peace on Earth" Jill and Sy Miller, 1955)