
Light in a Dark World



Holmeswood Church
Advent Devotional 2025

Introduction

Advent has always been a season of waiting—of holy anticipation for what is yet to come. But this waiting is not passive. It is the patient, courageous hope of people who dare to look at the world as it truly is—its beauty and its brokenness—and still believe that love will have the final word.

In these days when shadows often feel long—when news cycles, injustices, and personal grief can weigh heavily—it can be tempting to believe that the darkness is all there is. And yet, Advent whispers another truth: *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”* (John 1:5)

For Followers of Christ, this light is not about triumphal certainty or escaping the world’s pain. It is about presence—God’s presence in the midst of it all. It is the light that shows us what is real: our interconnection, our shared humanity, and the divine spark that still flickers in every heart. This is not a light that blinds or excludes; it is one that welcomes, heals, and reveals.

This devotional invites you to journey through the season of Advent with open eyes and an open heart. Each reflection, prayer, and practice will invite you to notice the light—sometimes radiant and clear, sometimes fragile and small—that still shines around and within you. As we move toward the mystery of Christmas, may we become bearers of that light: tending it with tenderness, sharing it with courage, and trusting that even the smallest flame can push back the dark.

May this season remind us that light is not something we must manufacture—it is something already here, waiting to be recognized, received, and shared.

**Come, Lord Jesus, Light of the World.
Come, and illumine our hearts anew.**



“Light in the Darkness” By Allison Hager

The First Week of Advent



HOPE
IN A DARK WORLD

Scripture

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” — John 1:5

Reflection

Hope is the first candle we light in Advent because hope is what keeps us waiting, even when the night feels long.

Advent hope doesn't deny pain — it looks at it and still dares to believe that light is coming. Jesus is God's promise that no darkness is too deep for God's presence.

Guided Meditation

- 1 Find stillness. Light a candle or imagine one flickering before you.
- 2 Picture the darkness — both in the world and in your own heart.
- 3 Now imagine a single light glowing, spreading warmth and courage.
- 4 Breathe slowly and whisper:
“The darkness has not overcome it.”
- 5 Rest in the quiet, letting hope rise within you.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, Light of the World, when shadows feel heavy, remind me that Your light still shines. Keep hope alive in my heart and help me reflect that hope to others. Amen.

Practice

Light a candle each evening this week and whisper:

“Jesus, be my hope.”

December 1

Light in a Dark World

By David McDaniel

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. - Genesis 1:3

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. - John 1:5

In the beginning, there was darkness. Chaos. Randomness. Rumbling.

Yet, God was there. Present. Not threatened nor afraid.

But steady. Breathing. Inhaling. Exhaling.

Then in a calculated moment, God said, "Let there be light." And God breathed out light.

This created light didn't shout. It didn't flash nor strobe. It didn't need to do so.

The light was constant. Consistent. Warm. Inviting. Strong.

Curiously, the light didn't erase all the darkness. There was still chaos. There was still uncertainty. But now there was less of it because the light opened the possibility for everything else to fall into place.

And no matter how hard the darkness tried, it never overpowered the light.

Darkness is a part of life. It always has been. It always will be.

Uncertainty exists. Grief is real. Injustice is alive and pain is strong.

Advent does not deny this nor does it ask us to put a smile on our face and pretend everything is merry and bright.

No, Advent proclaims, "There is darkness in creation. There is chaos in life. There is pain right now...And there is still Light. God's Light will never succumb to the darkness."

You can find the Light in:

Hope. Trusting that something new can still grow.

Peace. Trusting in God's presence when all of life is so overwhelming.

Joy. Trusting the small moments of the sacred in everyday life are connected to the essence of God.

Love. Trusting this is where all of creation began and where all of creation is going.

God is not afraid of the darkness. God is present in the midst of the darkness.

Light is born again, and again, and again. Right here. Right now. Today. Tomorrow.

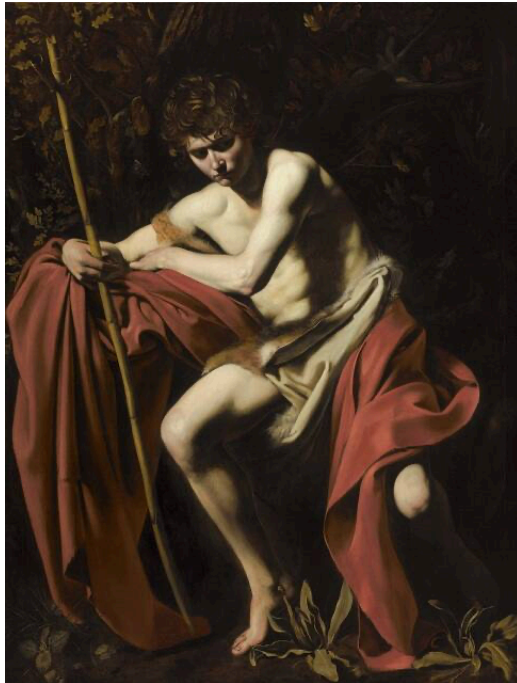
And forever.

December 2

The Darker the Shadow, the Brighter the Light

By Lina Smith

One of our most prized Kansas City gems is the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and our family never takes for granted the privilege of ready access to its remarkable collection. Each time we visit, regardless of the section on which we focus that day, we always include an abiding moment with our favorite painting, Caravaggio's *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness*—its contemplative features drawing me into wellsprings of thought and emotion. I find that each viewing touches me in a unique way, perhaps corresponding to my current circumstances, frame of mind, or aroused memories.



This painting reminds me that our senses, particularly our sight, are designed to perceive contrast, not total brightness. What gives form to an object is our ability to detect differences in light against dark. Caravaggio famously harnessed the technique of chiaroscuro—the use of those contrasts between light and shadow to achieve greater realism, depth, and volume; he gained even further dramatic effect by developing tenebrism, a more intense use of contrast, accentuating the dominant presence of darkness to spotlight the highlighted image of the painting's subject. Unlike more traditional artists, Caravaggio began by covering his entire canvas in dark shadow before applying brighter colors to define and illuminate his subject. The somber, reflective effect of this technique on my favorite painting is particularly inspiring. Often, the intensity of its brightness magnified by the depth of its shadow reminds me that the times in my life when I have most profoundly experienced the inextinguishable flame of the restorative presence of God have occurred in the midst of greatest darkness, despair, and overwhelming isolation.

The master artist himself manifested an electrifying display of contrast—evidenced by the discordance between his art and his personal life; Caravaggio was as equally adept with a sword in his hand as with a paint brush. In between the days dedicated to his exceptionally gifted, inspirational painting, he spent his energies on a violent life of brawling—leading to severe consequences. Scholars estimate that Caravaggio painted at least 74 religious works, the largest genre of his collection, and, though the status of Caravaggio's faith is unknown, contemporary church leaders reported that persons prompted toward spiritual redemption and transformation by his paintings likely numbered in the thousands. The astonishing incongruity presented by the fact that a convicted murderer created such impactful, life-changing works triggers a thought: if the Lord can so employ a knife-wielding, fight-picking artist to promote saving grace, what can God do with a cognitive-declining, stamina-diminishing oldster such as I?

Much to the dismay of some of his contemporary critics (but to my delight!), Caravaggio often employed “people of the streets” to pose for some of his most famous religious paintings, even using a prostitute to model the Virgin Mary: an enlightening contrast, because his chosen models were the VERY people Jesus came to seek and to save and to love. In Jesus, those ostracized by society found friendship, compassion, and healing as he embodied/exemplified inclusive beloved community.

The wilderness of the painting both formed and sustained John the Baptist as he emerged a fully committed prophet and forerunner of the Messiah, drawing multitudes to repentant baptism; Jesus’s own wilderness experience shaped and clarified his purpose and his ministry. In like manner, my faith and commitment are defined and refined by my grappling with edifying wilderness.

In the beginning, sparking the intense life-giving, hope-building brightness that first penetrated the chaos of darkness covering the universe’s canvas, the sovereign, almighty Creator spoke, “Let there be light!” Upon the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, when the promised Messiah broke through into the bleakness and despair of humanity, the gently-kind, all-embracing Good Shepherd encouraged, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

December 3

Choose Light

By Pat Tennison

Recently in my BFG we studied Luke 18: 35-43, the story of the blind beggar by the side of the road to Jerusalem. Although he could not see the light, the story teaches us that the man's brain was working. He recognized Jesus as he traveled near Jericho. He believed Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah. As Jesus passed by, he loudly called out to Jesus and asked for mercy. The crowd was annoyed by the behavior of the outsider. But Jesus understood the man. "What do you want me to do for you", Jesus asked. The blind man replied, "I want to see". Jesus tells him (and us) your "faith has saved you". The man opened his eyes and he could see the light. He then followed Jesus and sang praises to GOD for the light in his life. And so with us, we can be in the dark or we can believe with faith and act as Jesus taught and let the light into our life to shine as the blind man did. The choice is ours to make. Choose light! It makes all the difference.



December 4

A Faith like Mary

By Karen Palmer

Every day, I am inundated with news headlines about the unjust conditions facing humanity—divisions over both small and large issues affecting citizens of this country and people around the globe. If I'm not careful, I can almost be swallowed up by despair and tragedy. I have to remind myself that not only do I have control over the information I take in, but I also have a responsibility to educate myself on what is fact and what is not. If I'm not vigilant, I can let the darkness snuff out the light of hope, beauty, and sacredness I encounter each day.

As we enter this Advent season, we begin to prepare for one of the most sacred times of the year in the Christian Church. I wonder if the young and very pregnant Mary may have felt the same overwhelming uncertainty that I sometimes feel when bombarded by headlines portraying darkness and gloom. Here she is, swollen with child, never having experienced the pain of childbirth, and now uprooted from her family. The man she is betrothed to—perhaps twice her age—has taken her on a journey to be counted as his wife. Like us, the last several months of her life must have felt like a whirlwind, leaving her unable to fully grasp what was happening and never imagining how her life would be transformed by the spark of life within her. Listen to how Mary responds in Luke 1:46–50:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”



“Mary’s Song” By Lauren Wright Pittman

I invite you to embrace a faith like that of young Mary as we prepare our hearts during this Advent season and soon welcome a new year. May we be faithful servants of God, called to love others and seek justice—just as the child she carried would show us the way in years to come.

Prayer: God of all creation, Word who became flesh among us, we come before you with open hearts. We seek to be humble and faithful, just as your servant Mary was. Let us remember all the great things you have done for us as we reflect on this past year and look toward the future you have promised. May we respond to your grace and blessings by seeing Jesus the Christ, in all we encounter. Amen.

December 5

Light in a Dark World

By Lorraine Gengere

There was a time in my life when I couldn't see the light anymore. Everything felt heavy — the responsibilities, the disappointments, the exhaustion of trying to be strong for everyone else while quietly falling apart inside. I smiled through the day and prayed through the night, but deep down, I felt lost.

I remember one morning sitting alone, feeling like I had reached my limit. I whispered, "Lord, I don't know how much longer I can do this." I expected silence, but instead, I felt a stillness — a quiet reminder that He was near. It wasn't a loud answer or a sudden breakthrough. It was peace. Just peace in the middle of my storm.

That moment became a turning point for me. I realized that God's light doesn't always come as a bright flash that changes everything overnight. Sometimes, it's a small flicker — just enough to remind you you're not alone. It's in the strength to get up one more morning, the smile of a child who loves you unconditionally, the beauty of a sunrise that tells you there's still more ahead.

The world around us can feel dark — with so much pain, uncertainty, and fear. But I've learned that light shines the brightest in the dark. The birth of Jesus was proof of that. God sent His Son into a world filled with chaos and oppression, yet that tiny baby became the everlasting light that would never be extinguished.

When I look back now, I see how God used my darkest seasons to draw me closer to Him. He didn't remove every storm, but He gave me light to walk through them. That light grew stronger as I trusted Him more — and eventually, I began to see purpose in my pain.

If you're walking through a dark season right now, hold on. God's light is not gone; it might just be flickering quietly, waiting for you to notice. Don't lose hope. The same light that broke through the night in Bethlehem is still shining for you today.

Let that light guide you, comfort you, and remind you that even when life feels uncertain — God is still here. His light still shines. And it will never be overcome.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." — John 1:5



Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for being the light that never fades, even when life feels dark and uncertain. Help me to see Your presence in the small, quiet moments and to trust that Your light will guide me through every storm. Teach me to be a reflection of Your love and hope to others who are struggling to find their way.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 6

A Whiff of Decembers Past

By Carole Zahnd

A dollar under my plate, homesewn pink flannel pajamas...

And a birthday cake...

A trip across the creek with Frank to cut a pine tree...

Getting wet dragging the tree across the creek...

Warming by a coal stove...

Colorful cellophane balls, somewhat battered...

Covering the tree with carefully placed icicles...

Two baby dolls wrapped in a tiny pink flannel blanket...

Placed in a homemade small wooden cradle...

A silver dollar from Uncle Bill and...

Jane Eyre from Aunt Ruth...

The simple delight of Aunt Hattie in

Receiving a new bottle of Jergen's Lotion...

Piling into the cab of our old red truck...

Going to church on Christmas Eve...

Driving to East Hill to wonder at the...

Lovely lights in the town below...

Returning home to hear my Dad read...

"In Those Days a Decree went out from Caesar Augustus..."

The Second Week of Advent



Scripture

“You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” — Isaiah 26:3

Reflection

Peace isn't the absence of noise or struggle — it's the presence of Christ within them.

In a world that feels unsteady, God's peace anchors us. Like a calm river beneath a stormy surface, God's peace flows steady, deep, and true.

Guided Meditation

- 1 Take three slow, steady breaths.
- 2 Imagine standing beside quiet waters — the surface smooth, reflecting soft light.
- 3 Feel the tension release from your body with each exhale.
- 4 Invite Jesus into your thoughts and whisper:
“You are my peace.”
- 5 Let His calm settle over your heart.

Closing Prayer

Prince of Peace, still the storms within me.

Let Your peace fill my heart and overflow into every place I go this week. Amen.

Practice

When anxiety rises, pause and take one deep breath. Whisper:

“Peace of Christ, fill me.”

December 8

Christmas in September

By Brittany Ramirez

(CBF Field Personnel serving in Baguio, Philippines)

Since moving to the Philippines last year to minister among mainland Chinese folks here, we have had to learn a lot about our new ministry location. One thing we learned very soon after arriving is that in the Philippines, Christmas starts in September! Here, they call it the “ber” months. SeptemBER, OctoBER, NovemBER, DecemBER. It is a huge deal, but a weird adjustment. This year at the mall I heard Mariah Careys “All I Want for Christmas” playing as early as August 31st. Imagine doing 4 months of Elf on the Shelf!

While it is a bit odd for us, Filipinos cherish this tradition. And I am beginning to enjoy the slow work up to Christmas. As the Christmas and holiday seasons increasingly seem overwhelming and focused on consumerism, this slowing down and taking time to feel the coming of the Christmas season is a helpful reminder to myself to slow down and remember what this season is about. Each week we see new signs of Christmas showing up in the city. Just this week (November 1st) the city is starting to decorate the main circle in town with more Christmas decorations often influenced by beautiful Catholic icons (Philippines is a majority Catholic country). It is almost as if the “ber” months are just an extended Advent, giving everyone enough time to fully prepare themselves for this Light coming in the darkness.



Mother and Child, Philippine Christmas Parol

Maybe putting up your Christmas tree in September isn't the only way to remind you to slow down, but I do pray that this year, as you slow down and focus on Advent and the preparation of our hearts and souls for the arrival of "God with Us" we can remember and reflect on the Light and Presence of Christ in our lives during the colder, darker "ber" months! As you reflect this Advent season, remember to pray for the Global Church that is also reflecting on this Light in the darkness. Please pray for the mainland Chinese community that we are connecting with here in the Philippines. Pray that as they are reminded literally everywhere around them about Christmas here, that they will have opportunities to see, hear, and know this true Light in our midst, and feel the presence of the Divine with them in this place.

December 9

Light without Light

By Tim Freeman

Genesis chapter one speaks of light before a sun or moon are spoken into existence. We might wonder in our 21st century minds, why would G-d not create things in an order of which we would scientifically agree? Perhaps the author of Genesis intended something else?

Light in that timeframe is an entity not normally associated with putative planetary/heavenly bodies. We've gained so much more knowledge of the universe that while furthering our inter-spiritual cohesion, would likely confound the author of Genesis and Hebrew followers of Elohim/YHWH in the 6th century BCE. Pondering visible light beyond a utilitarian view of light's properties can help us further ground our connection to G-d and each other. Twentieth century mystic, Thomas Merton, speaks to light in an excerpt from a diary entry, *A Member of the Human Race*; Merton comes to a similar conclusion regarding G-d's name in us as Abraham Joshua Heschel . The lead up to the excerpt captures Merton's reflections on his experience seeing all the people in downtown Louisville and experience the love G-d has for them and was removed for length reasons:

"At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is

inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.

I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.”



December 10

No Pain, No Gain

By Carol Swezy

What does no pain, no gain mean? People must experience pain to make gain? This seems like a positive ending to a difficult journey. Do we learn lessons on this journey and make future changes? Personally, I believe your attitude each day you roll out of bed is a key factor! Focusing on hope, peace, joy, love, and light affects how you go about your day. It is overwhelming many days to keep these at the forefront of your mind. Darkness tries to creep in but with Christ- light will always prevail. We should remind ourselves each day that as we leave our homes, to embrace and show love for all. Holmeswood has been through periods of “pain” and as a congregation we have gained more than I could have ever imagined. Enjoy this season of advent and be grateful for ALL!



December 11

Light in a Heavy World

By Erin McDaniel

When I first think of “light in a dark world,” my instinct is to ask, What can I offer? How can I be light for someone else? God’s light shines within me, allowing me to share that brightness with others who may be walking through shadow.

But the word light has another meaning — to be unburdened, to be free from weight. There are days when I don’t feel radiant or full of God’s light. Days when the darkness feels closer than the glow. On those days, maybe my calling isn’t to shine but to lift.

Perhaps being light in a dark world sometimes means being light in a heavy world — helping to ease another’s load, listening without judgment, offering gentleness where the world is hard. God’s presence can shine through both brightness and compassion, through radiant joy and quiet kindness.

And maybe that’s the truest reflection of Advent hope: that even when we don’t feel like light ourselves, God still works through us — not only to shine, but to lighten.

December 12

Light

By Jim Campbell

In 2020 Conor Knighton published "LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS". It gave an overview and impressions of his "Acadia - to - Zion journey through every National Park (N.P.) in one year. His presentation, by category, includes; MOUNTAINS: Rocky Mountain N.P., CAVES: Carlsbad Caverns N.P., TREES: Redwood N.P. You get the idea. In the topic of LIGHT: Great Basin National Park draws our focus.



Located in the state of Nevada, Las Vegas is "the brightest spot on our entire planet when viewed from space." Less than 300 miles away is Great Basin N.P. A park ranger stated "it is one of the - if not the darkest place in the lower 48" states. LIGHT!? At Great Basin the stars are the "star" attraction.

"The First Noel" took place in a "Dark Sky" location like Great Basin N.P.. Shepherds out in the fields were watching their sheep at night. Millions of stars were visible when suddenly an Angel of the Lord appeared to them, brighter than anything they had seen before. The Glory of the Lord shone around them and they were afraid. But the Angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:8-11)

The Dark Sky was the stage for the greatest Celestial show ever witnessed. Until the invention of the electric light bulb in the 1880's, a dark sky was visible in every back yard. It's now estimated more than "two thirds of the country live in areas where the Milky Way "is not visible from a back yard. LIGHT pollution is real.

Looking into a night sky presents a challenge to find constellations, planets, or moving objects. It's impossible to count the stars or fathom how large the universe is and how small we are. "When I gaze into the night skies. . . .

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you have set in place,
What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor"
(Psalm 8:3-5 NIV)

Sometimes a Dark Sky is needed to clearly see the
"LIGHT OF THE WORLD"

December 13

World Need

By Tammie Kresse-Lowry

You are the light of the world.—Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount as relayed in the gospel of Matthew

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.—Jesus, as relayed in the gospel of John

“Christmas arrives to find our health precarious, our careers, jobs, or vocations under stress; our finances dipping badly; our relationships in need of repair; our society and world either slightly or wildly insane. How can we celebrate Christmas in situations like these? Aren’t negative circumstances too much for us? Do they not call the shots, either tentatively supporting us or conspiring to break us? ...When the outer world is darkness, Christmas encourages us to rest in the inner world of light and bring that light into the outer world of darkness.” – theologian John (Jack) Shea

Across the arc of history, the world has shown it can be a dark place filled with despair, war, hatred, and power politics. Sadly, in the course of history, some Christians added to this darkness by supporting those who were out to destroy, who hated, who claimed their power plays were the will of God. Discouragingly and perplexedly, we are still confronted with daily examples of some Christians today who side with darkness by supporting fascist leaders, by thinking leaders who create enemies and who are in it for their own personal power, and glory are in the right—in the light; and when these self-centered leaders claim their acts are the will of God, these Christians show support. Anne Lamott was spot-on when she wrote “You can safely assume you’ve

created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

Lest we give up hope for Peace on Earth and Love for All, let's remember that in the arc of history, there has also been goodness, there has been and continues to be lights in the darkness. Some of these lights are Christians, some are people of other religions, some claim no religion affiliation at all. That makes one think of the parable of the Sheep and the Goats but we'll leave that topic for another day.

The concept of light over darkness is worldwide and often celebrated by a festival or a special season. “God has called the church to be an un-anxious presence in the midst of this society.” --Walter Brueggemann wrote in A Gospel of Hope.

Christianity isn't the only religion that celebrates light overcoming darkness. For Christians, Advent and Christmas is a time to contemplate the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of Christ. Weekly lighting Advent candles propels us ponder our role of being light in a dark world.

We can learn from other faiths and other people. In the book Holy Envy, Barbara Brown Taylor shares something she tells students. “If it is God you want, look for the light and not the diamond. There are many facets, and yet the light is not in any of them. Their beauty lies in their ability to reflect what is beyond them.” Later, in the same book, she writes “If your faith depends on being God's only child, then the discovery that there are others can lead you to decide that someone must be wrong—or that everyone belongs, which means that no religion, including yours, is the entire ocean.”

Diwali is a Hindu/Sikh/Jain festival with a multitude of lights that celebrates the victory of light over darkness, good over evil. The Chinese Lantern Festival recognizes hope, family unity, and new beginnings. An ancient Incan Festival of the Sun also called Inti

Raymi is celebrated during the Winter Solstice (June) in Peru and focuses on the light of the Sun during their shorter and colder days. Similar to Advent, in Columbia, Dia de las Velitas (Day of the Little Candles) is an early December festival that starts the Christmas season.

Eight days of lighting a Menorah is at the center of the Jewish Festival of Lights also called Hanukkah. Of that holiday, Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote in an article called What One Candle Can Do:

“...Chanukah is more than the remembering of an ancient victory. It is the Jewish response to the gloom of winter, lighting one candle and yet another against the gathering darkness. It is our way of expressing our profound belief that God will not permit utter darkness to prevail. ... we ask ourselves how powerful and sinister can the darkness be if it can be overcome by the light of one little candle? ...When the darkness seems overwhelming—it can be spiritual darkness as well as the darkness of winter night—we need to be reminded that it is powerless to withstand the smallest bit of illumination. As our world grows colder and darker during the winter months, we must do what Jews and Christians alike have been taught to do at this season. Light a candle in someone’s life and see how it makes the darkness flee. A little bit of light is all we need—but we need that little bit so badly.”

This sentiment give encouragement to be a light—we may not be able to light up the entire world but we can add to the light the world needs rather than add more to the darkness of the world. “Humans are born broken. They live by mending. The grace of God is the glue.” –Eugene O’Neill

While a youth in Germany during WWII, Jürgen Moltmann, served in the German Army Air Force auxiliary. At the end of the war in 1945, in the dark of the forest, he surrendered to the first British soldier he encountered and then became a post-war prisoner of war for three years. Later, in his meditation *The Disarming Child*, he shares...”the peace of God shines like a light

into the conflicts and experiences of real life....For if this message really lays hold of us, it leads us to Jesus the liberator, and to the people who live in darkness and who are waiting for him – and for us. A people in darkness; today I see before me the millions of the imprisoned, the exiled, the deported, the tortured and the silenced everywhere in the world where people are pushed into this darkness. The important thing is not the nations, which can be accused of these things. What is important is the worldwide siblinghood of the men and women who are living in darkness. For it is on them that this divine light now shines. Peoples in darkness: how that cries out today from The Third World in Africa and Asia, and from the Third World in our own country – cries out for liberation and human rights! The struggle for power and for oil and for weapons ruins the weak, enriches the wealthy, and gives power to the powerful. This divided world is increasingly capable of turning into a universal prison camp. And we are faced with the burning question: on which side of the barbed wire are we living, and at what cost? The people in darkness see the great light. To this people – to them first of all – the light shines in all its brightness. To these people the child is born for the peace of all. Do we belong to this people, or do we cling to our own lights...?” Moltmann’s thoughts could have been written yesterday; yet, they were written decades ago.

Yes, the world can be a hard, cold, dark place. “The world is Lucy teeing up the football.” –(Anne Lamott) however, we are called to be lights in the world. The Christian example of light is Jesus Christ. A leader who didn’t hate, didn’t make political power plays, wasn’t in it for himself. Rather, Jesus was a leader who Loved and showed us the way with the light of Love. We can be the “smallest bit of illumination” to overcome darkness.



A prayer by St. Teresa of Avila:
Christ has no body now, but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which
Christ looks compassion into the world.
Yours are the feet
With which Christ walks to do good.
Yours are the hands
With which Christ blesses the world.

The Third Week of Advent



Scripture

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.” —
Isaiah 9:2*

Reflection

Joy is the surprise of light breaking through the dark.

It's not dependent on everything being right — it's born from the deep knowing that Christ is near.

Joy dances in the shadows, defying despair, declaring that God's goodness will have the final word.

Guided Meditation

- 1 Sit quietly and recall a moment when you felt true joy — a memory that still warms you.
- 2 Let gratitude fill you.
- 3 Imagine light spreading from that joy — illuminating your whole being.
- 4 Whisper slowly:
“Your joy is my strength.”
- 5 Let a soft smile form — an act of quiet worship.

Closing Prayer

Lord of Joy, thank You for being my reason to sing even in the dark. Let Your light dance through my life and bring joy to those around me. Amen.

Practice

Write down one small joy each day this week — a kindness, a sunrise, a moment of laughter.

Notice how light grows when you pay attention to it.

December 15

A Kindled Glow

By Michael Huerter

Waiting for the dawn through a sleepless night
The dark stretches on, endless
What can Advent mean
When light, hope, peace, joy, love, in my own individual heart, for
my own self, are insufficient and unthinkable?
What good is it for me to have hope if my community does not;
For me to feel at peace when the world is torn by war;
To sing for joy among a people divided and wrathful;
To feel love when others hate;
What difference could it make?
My unsettled heart will not settle for this.

But is there still a spark? Even in me?
Can I shelter it, nurture a glow
Something to share, to shine in the dark
Have I been given a gift?

Perhaps not
Maybe I have only ashes
A wick smoldering to smoke
An ember dimly fading

But even then
What is there to do
But brush clear the soot
Find that final piece of warmth
In the cold and unsettled dust
And breathe
Awaiting some miracle

Beyond my mind's reach
That where a gentle wind stirs
Divine breath can still kindle
Tending this darkened coal
Into a small gem that gleams

Can I be carried
When I am not enough?
Could I join with others
And allow myself to be a small piece
Of a greater light
Gathered from far flung stars
Scattered to burn out, isolated

If the Divine is moving in me
It is towards you
If the Divine is moving in us
It is towards "together"
Where burdens can be shared
Vision given voice
Where Hope, Peace, Joy, Love
Are not platitudes spoken in naïve lip service to shallow
marketing and cheap tinsel
But have faces and names and memories of beloved community
Nothing else will do
But the Divine with us
And in us: you, and me, and all

December 16

Joy

By Patty Freeman

Psalm 30:5 (NASB) says, “Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.” Notice it doesn’t say “... happiness...”; it says “...joy comes in the morning.” And it’s not just “joy,” but a shout of joy! How cool is that?

The word “joy” appears in scripture well over 200 times depending on the translation. On the other hand, “happiness” appears less than 20 times. So what’s the deal? Aren’t they synonymous?

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote, “Find out where joy resides, and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all.” Now, I don’t know about you, but I had to think about that a while – especially the part about “a voice far beyond singing.” To me, music is the greatest expression of joy EVER! So how can joy be given a voice far beyond the voice of music? (Note: I’m still thinking about this. If I ever come up an answer, I’ll let you know.)



The other great question I would pose to the universe is this: What does the birth of a baby, a really long time ago, in a place called Bethlehem have to do with joy? I grew up in a Baptist church, so I'm very familiar with all the standard spiel about Christmas joy, etc., but none of that stuff really answers the question.

When I think of my daughter (who is now in her 40's), I still feel the same joy I experienced the day I found out I was pregnant. I feel the joy I had the first time I held that tiny bundle in my arms. I especially feel it during the holidays, since she was born just 5 days after Christmas. But none of that connects with the Bible's Bethlehem baby birth we celebrate. It's just not the same! But then...maybe it doesn't have to be...

I've come to the conclusion that happiness is what you see with your eyes, but joy is who and what you hold in your heart. According to Henri Nouwen, "Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day."

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

December 17

God's Love

By Miriam McDaniel

God is glory. Glory can be lots of things. Love, hope, and it can be like a page being turned in a book.

My favorite thing about Christmas is that I can sit by the fire, have hot chocolate, and knit. But I also think it would be fun to just play in the snow and get away with everything. But those are my opinions. So you can do what you want.

Christmas is the story of when God was born. The star was here, and it was about the wise men. Mary and Joseph were on their way to Bethlehem. This is a peak of the story. I hope you liked reading this, and Merry Christmas!



December 18

Rest

By Randall J. Greene

We need rest.

Oh, our God-bodies were not made
to labor through such endless nights.

I've seen you spent,

Now I'll tend to hope's soft flicker-flame
While you sleep awhile; I'll carry our light.

Reflection Questions

- Has there been a time when you've needed rest and someone came to help you?
- How can you know if someone in your life needs rest?
- Who do you know in need of rest right now? How can you bring them hope today?

December 19

I am the Light of the World

By John Ussery

The year I turned 50, I ran in the Midnight Sun Marathon (26.2 mi) that is north of the Arctic Circle in Tromso, Norway. The race began at 8:00 p.m. and I finished shortly before midnight. After I got something to eat and drink, I was walking around with my brother listening to conversations in languages other than English; it was a new experience for me. At some point, I looked at my watch and saw that it was around 1:30 in the morning - and the sun was still on the horizon! In June in this part of the world, the sun never sets. It is literally light all day long. But this is also the place where in January the sun never shines!

“You are the light of the world. A town on a hill cannot be hidden,” Jesus told the people in the Sermon on the Mount. So what does He mean for me to be the Light of the world? And what about a town on a hill that isn’t hidden? It is fascinating to be driving through the Flint Hills in the middle of the night and see twinkling lights ahead, and to realize it is a town some 40-50 miles away; it is definitely not hidden.

I believe I should shine the Light of Jesus by showing the love of God to others; when I see someone going through a dark time in their life, they need to know there’s a light at the end of the tunnel. I don’t always know where someone is in their lives; I may not know if it’s midnight here or January in Tromso, Norway. I need to always be the Light of Jesus, to show God’s love to everyone, every day. Sometimes that means just listening to a friend share what’s going on; sometimes that means walking with a person to help them through the darkness in their life.

Right now in this country, it feels like winter north of the Arctic Circle- it’s a dark time. And yet we are a people with Hope. It’s up to you and me to share that Hope with others by shining the Love of Jesus - being the Light in a world of darkness.

December 20

Light amongst Monsters

By Daniel Smith

It was a Muppet show like no other when they invited rock star Alice Cooper to be the guest star. You wouldn't normally expect someone like that, but the tentacles of the Muppet show were long and strong. As one may imagine, the monsters of the Muppet show had a field day, dominating the content. It is an episode I like to watch for Halloween, and once you see it, it'll be clear why. Spooky monsters, Alice Cooper coming out of a coffin, weird castle sets, and a Faustian contract making its way around the characters backstage. Poor Fozzie Bear thinks he can stay away from the weirdness by staying in the cantina, but no, that doesn't work. Everyone around him looks normal, but in reality is some kind of creepy monster.

In desperation, he cries out,

"Why can't we have one thing nice on this show tonight?"

I wonder how many of us can sympathize with Fozzie. Life can be cruel, unfair, and downright evil. The world we live in is a mess. We have resources for everyone, yet so many millions experience untold hunger, thirst, sickness, and depravation. We tell children that monsters aren't real, but is that really the truth? Starvation is a monster. Ignorance is a monster. How many of us fight each and every day against monsters like devastating depression, crippling anxiety, or other various mental problems that threaten to overwhelm us?

How much pain and anguish do we cause one another? That is, indeed, monstrous.

Such is the reality we created for ourselves when we rebelled against God and appointed ourselves overlords of the Earth. But that is not the whole story, just as that isn't the whole story of the Alice Cooper Muppet show. For right after Fozzie's plea, the camera shifts to a peaceful brook in a beautiful forest, where we find little Robin Frog sitting by it, looking at his reflection. With gentle piano music in the background, Robin begins to sing:

*"Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high
There's a land that I heard of once in a lullaby"*

God did not leave us. God refused to abandon us. God loved us so much that he reached out into our darkness and gave us a light named Jesus Christ, born to save us from the monsters we created. In the midst of the monsters of darkness, greed, and lust for power, Jesus was born to save us, to show us the way, to help us make this world more like the way God intended it to be. In the middle of a weird, creepy Muppet show, we have one of the best renditions of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." In the middle of our dark, creepy world, a light was born to show us the way out.

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.
As on the day of Midian, you've shattered the yoke that
burdened them,
the staff on their shoulders,
and the rod of their oppressor.
Because every boot of the thundering warriors,
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned, fuel for the fire.
A child is born to us, a son is given to us,
and authority will be on his shoulders.*

*He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be vast authority and endless peace
for David's throne and for his kingdom,
establishing and sustaining it
with justice and righteousness
now and forever*

Isaiah 9:2,4-7



"The Cross of Love" By Hayden McDaniel

The Fourth Week of Advent



Scripture

“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.” — John 1:9

Reflection

At the heart of Advent is love — a love that came down to dwell with us.

Christ’s love enters our darkness not as a blazing spotlight, but as a gentle flame that invites us closer.

Love is the light that never goes out, even when the world feels cold.

Guided Meditation

- 1 Close your eyes and imagine a small flame glowing within your heart.
- 2 With each breath, the flame grows warmer, brighter — filling you with love.
- 3 Now imagine that light spreading outward — to your home, your neighbors, your world.
- 4 Whisper: “Your love is the light of my life.”
- 5 Rest in the warmth of divine love.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Love made flesh, Shine through me so that others may feel Your warmth. Teach me to love as You love — patiently, bravely, endlessly. Amen.

Practice

Do one act of quiet love each day — a note, a prayer, a small kindness — and imagine you are lighting another candle in the dark.

December 22

“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine”

By Tammy Gill

One great gift I have in my life right now is the opportunity to spend Fridays with my baby grandson, Robin. As I write this today he is 3 months old.

It is amazing how much he has grown and how much he has learned in his short time with us. He is a big boy with big blue eyes, sprigs of red hair on his big-little head, long legs and fingers that he is looking at as he begins to reach out to touch the toys and books around him. He is stronger every time I see him, pushing up on his elbows and holding his head on his own. He is smiling at me and “talking” to me, waiting for me to smile and talk back to him. We can spend hours doing that!

As amazing as all of these physical changes are to observe and cheer about there is something even more I see growing in Robin. Something even more breathtaking and inspiring. I cannot stop staring into his eyes. It is the Light.

There is a literal light in his eyes I see that sparkles and shines back at me. Have you noticed that with someone from your life? Perhaps you know what I mean.

The Light is there and when we lock eyes and maybe everything else is silent it holds power. It is a power of warmth and gentleness and strength all at once that is sparking a fire between us that has the power to cleanse and heal all manner of pain and suffering.

The baby that we are waiting for this Advent comes again to remind us of this Light that comes from the Source of all Light. Everyone born has been created with this Light Source energy that when it finds another soul with whom to connect can start a fire big enough to redeem and heal the world.

It is so easy to forget this simple truth that we need this reminder every Christmas. The Light is not somewhere far away, beyond us. The Light is not something to be searched for or grabbed and taken. The Light is not something we can get if we are good enough or smart enough or wise enough. The Light is rather something within us to be recognized and celebrated and to be fanned into fullness by the connections in our community . . . our family.

Family, may we take the time to look into one another's eyes this season. May we pause long enough and be silent enough to see the flickering flames within one another and share in the process of growing those flickers into full-fledged bonfires of love!

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

--Matthew 5:14-16

December 23

Tunnel of Light

By Kris Collins

I work in mid-town of the city but live a little further south. On my drive to and from work I have the pleasure of driving down Ward Parkway. If you've ever driven on Ward Parkway, you know both sides of the street are lined with trees. So many big, beautiful trees. And in autumn, all those big, beautiful trees are filled with red, yellow, and orange leaves. It's gorgeous. Every morning for the last three years I feel as if I'm driving through a tunnel of vibrant colored trees and I'm happy. I find myself smiling and having conversations with God about gratitude. However, more and more lately my conversations with God are filled with angst, sadness, and if I'm honest, anger, at the state of our country. And instead of driving through a tunnel of vibrant colored trees, it feels like I'm being swallowed in a canopy of darkness.

Sometimes the weight of the world is heavy. I have friends who are in federal government jobs and are not being paid, yet are working every day. There are families in the community in which I work that may soon not have childcare. Food insecurity for families is at an all-time high. And people of color are being picked up by ICE and separated from their children and families. In my mind, these are truly dark days. Where is the light? How do we find peace?

And just as I asked that question during my daily drive to work, I was given the answer on my drive home. Standing on the sidewalk on the beloved Ward Parkway with a large sign held above his head, was an elderly man. He was standing in the grass next to one of those big, beautiful trees with his hand-written sign showing defiance against all the darkness. I drove past him as he stood alone waving his sign at every car that

drove past him. The next day as I was driving home, he was standing in the same place, with the same sign. And again, the day after that, and the day after that. Some days he held a different sign, but he was always there – standing alone and holding a big, hand-made sign above his head.

I found myself looking forward to seeing him every day. I couldn't wait to pass by him and see if he would be there. Would he still be alone? Would he have a different sign today? Initially, I wondered why he stood out there every day. What did he think he was changing by holding up a sign for hours while cars sped by? Did people notice him as they drove by? I heard some cars honk, but no one stopped and there were never new people standing with him, so was he really making a difference?

YES! He became my thin thread of hope each day. A flicker of light in the dark tunnel. The weight of the world is heavy, and there is much work that needs to be done. We can't all be in positions to make huge impacts, but we can all do something. We can give groceries to food pantries. We can support organizations fighting for justice for others. We can check in on our friends who are struggling financially and mentally. We can hold a sign on the side of the street.

We can all be a flicker of light in a tunnel of darkness, and if enough of us flicker our light at the same time, we can shine as brightly as the One who continues to be the light for all of us.

December 24

EPIPHANY (When Light Entered My Darkness)

By Deborah Craig-Claar

I haven't any wealth
or riches to my name,
Though I've been granted health
great strength I can not claim.
I'm just a poor and simple soul
uncertain of my worth,
Then I approached a manger
and I beheld a birth.

Christ came in straw and swaddling
He came in poverty,
He did not come in strength or might
but helpless infancy.
And now I know He came this way
so I could understand,
That He will always love me
exactly as I am.

December 25

Christmas Day Meditation

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.” — Matthew 4:16

As you light the Christ candle, pause in gratitude:

The waiting is over.

The Light has come — and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Breathe deeply, and whisper:

“Welcome, Light of the World. Shine in me.”



Beloved Holiday Recipes

Microwave Peanut Brittle

By Pat Tennison

"So easy to make and so good! Perfect each time."

1 1/2 c. raw peanuts
1/2 c. white corn syrup
1 T. butter
1 tsp. baking soda
1 c. sugar
A few grains of salt
1 tsp. vanilla

Mix peanuts, sugar, syrup and salt in a glass mixing bowl. Cook 7 minutes in microwave on high until peanuts are browned and mixture is bubbling.

Quickly stir in butter and vanilla. Cook 2 minutes. Add baking soda and stir until mixture is foamy. Pour into greased baking sheet. Let cool 15 minutes or longer. Break into pieces and store in air tight container.



Crustless Jarlsberg Quiche

By Tammie Kresse-Lowry



1/2 cup unsalted butter
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups milk
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 cups small curd cottage
cheese
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
9 eggs
11 ounces cream cheese, softened
3/4 pound (12 ounces) Jarlsberg*
cheese, grated
1/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan
cheese

1. Preheat oven to 350 F (high altitude 375 F). Butter two 10-inch pie or quiche pans.
2. In a saucepan, melt butter over medium-low heat, add the flour and stir just until mixture bubbles. Slowly add milk, stirring constantly. Stir this cream sauce until it thickens. Set aside to cool.
3. Stir baking powder, mustard, and salt into cottage cheese.
4. Beat eggs well, then beat in softened cream cheese and cottage cheese mixture. Slowly beat in cream sauce, then thoroughly incorporate Jarlsberg and Parmesan cheeses.
5. Pour into two buttered 10-inch pie or quiche pans.
6. Bake for about 45 minutes or until puffed and browned. Once outside the oven, allow to cool approximately 5-10 minutes. Cut each quiche into desired sized pieces.

*Any Jarlsberg-like cheese will work.

Granny's Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

By Paulette Seidelman

3 eggs, well-beaten
1 cup raisins
1 tsp vanilla

Soak the raisins in this mixture for 1 hour.

Cream together 1 cup shortening, 1 cup brown sugar, and 1 cup of white sugar.

In a separate bowl combine 2 1/2 cups of sifted flour, 1 tsp salt, 2 tsp of baking soda, and 1 tsp of cinnamon.

Add this to the creamed mixture. Next add the egg mixture and 2 cups of old fashion oatmeal.

Form into balls and flatten. Bake at 350 for 8-10 minutes.



Braunschweiger Ball

By Tammie Kresse-Lowry

"This is a Kresse family favorite. It's also been a hit at wine tastings and other gatherings. Guten Appetit!"

8 oz Braunschweiger
8 oz cream cheese
1 Tablespoon chopped onion
2 Tablespoons lemon juice

1 Tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
Dash of garlic powder or salt
Dash of salt and pepper

Combine the above ingredients until desired consistency. Refrigerate. This can be made in advance; stays good for at least two weeks. Serve with crackers or bread.

Mexican Casserole

By Paulette Seidelman

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 lb of ground beef | Dash of ketchup |
| 1 can of chili (no beans) | 1 large onion (or less) |
| 1 can of tomato soup | 1/4 tsp of salt |
| 1 medium package of Fritos | 1 cup of shredded cheese |

Brown meat in a skillet. Add chopped onion and salt. Add chili and soup. Let simmer while stirring.

Mixture should be the consistency of gravy. If dry, add a small amount of water. Line a large casserole dish (1 1/2 to 2 quart dish) with 1/2 a package of Fritos. Pour in meat mixture. Add the rest of the Fritos on top. Next add the cheese on top of the Fritos. Bake 375 until cheese is melted.

Brownies

By Wanda Shipman



1 14-oz bag caramels, unwrapped
1/3 cup evaporated milk
1 pkg German chocolate cake mix
1/2 c melted butter
1/3 c evaporated milk
1 cup chopped pecans
1 cup chocolate chips
Powdered sugar

Melt caramels with 1/3 cup evaporated milk, set aside.

Grease and flour a 9x13 pan.

Mix cake mix, melted butter, 1/3 cup evaporated milk and 1 cup chopped pecans. Place half the dough in the greased pan. Bake for 6 minutes at 350F.

Remove from oven, sprinkle with chocolate chips, spread with caramels mixture.

On top, sprinkle rest of dough. Bake for 15 minutes at 350F. Cool.

Sprinkle with powdered sugar before serving.

Bueno Noche Christmas Salad

By Brittany Ramirez

"Noche Buena, which literally translates to "Good Night," is the Spanish term for Christmas Eve, celebrated with a large family feast on December 24th. It is a cherished tradition in Spain, Latin America, and the Philippines, where families gather after midnight mass. I learned recently that one important dish is a macaroni salad, so I will share my Mamaw's recipe for vermicelli salad!"

12 oz pkg. vermicelli (cooked, no salt- drain and rinse)

1 Tablespoon MSG (Accent)

1 Tablespoon Lawry's Seasoned Salt

3 Tablespoons Lemon Juice

4 Tablespoons Vegetable Oil

Put together and marinate overnight

Add following ingredients 2 hours before serving:

1 cup chopped green peppers (1 big pepper)

¾ cup sweet onion, chopped

2 cups diced celery

1 can chopped black olives

1.4 oz jar chopped pimentos

1 cup Mayonnaise

Ozark Bread Pudding

By Pat Tennison



"This is an old recipe used by my family for many years!"

3 large eggs
1 1/2 c sugar
2 T. Light brown sugar
1/2 tsp nutmeg

1/4 c melted butter
2 3/4 c whipping cream
4 c French bread (1" cubes)
3/4 c raisins

Combine eggs, sugars, nutmeg, add butter and whipping cream. Stir in French bread and raisins. Pour into lightly greased 9x13" pan. Bake 50 minutes in 350F oven. Serve with vanilla ice cream or vanilla sauce.

Vanilla Sauce

1/2 c sugar
Dash nutmeg
1 1/4 c whipping cream
1 large egg, slightly beaten

2 T. butter
1 T. flour
3 T. light brown sugar

Cook over medium heat until thick. Remove from heat and add 1 tablespoon vanilla. Serve over pudding.