

Light of the World
Advent Devotional



2018

Written by the community of
St. Peter's by the Sea

**The light shines in the darkness
and the darkness did not overcome it.
John 1:5 NRSV**

At a time when the lights around us
barely pierce the darkness of our communal soul;
When laser lights, spot lights and Christmas lights
try desperately to brighten our mood;
When candle lights, flash lights and lamp lights
guide only so far;
When star light and moon light
are only fleetingly seen;
We are reminded by John that the light that gives life
is the light that pierces our souls.
God's glory is above, around and, most of all, in us
in the gift of Jesus who is our light.

We share this precious gift of light in the words of
this devotional.
May your light shine brighter and more surely
fueled by the faith of those around you.
Empowered by the Holy Spirit,
let your light shine during this beautiful and
tender season.

~ Lenita Witherspoon

Saturday, December 1, 2018

Advent Wreath Week One : Hope

Light one purple candle.

The candle we light this first week of Advent represents hope, and how the prophets longed to see the time when the Messiah would bring peace and love to our world. As we begin this advent season, let us prepare our lives and our homes to receive the One who said, "I am the Light of the world."

Discuss: What were the people of Israel hoping and waiting for? The star represented hope and joy for the Magi, what does it represent for you? How can you bring the hope of Jesus to others?

Object: Star

Activity: Peel the back from the star and stick it somewhere in your home. Every time you see it, let it be a reminder of the Star of Bethlehem and the HOPE Jesus brings to the world.

Pray: In each person's own words, thank God for allowing us to have a relationship with Jesus, and for sending the star as a symbol of hope, grace, and the birth of a Savior.

Prayer: God thank you for the gift of hope that helps us to look forward to the future even if things seem difficult now. Please help us to look for your hope around us and help us to be hope to others. Amen.

Contributed by: Anna Sudeth



Sunday December 2, 2018

Hope

Isaiah 2:1-5 & Matthew 24:36-44

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” ~Matthew 24:42

We are people of the present. Sure, sometimes we look back and remember how things were in the past, when we were younger. And sometimes we look ahead and imagine where we'll be in five, ten or twenty years. But mostly we live in the now, just trying to get through the day, crossing off things on our to-do-list before crawling between the sheets at the end of another long day. Advent invites us to stop and wrestle with the important question, “Is there meaning to this life?” And Advent insists that history means something – that life is going somewhere, and each day is important so pay attention; be alert; be awake. As these words sink in, we begin to ask ourselves, “Well what are we supposed to do while we watch and wait?” When the Bible tells us to be alert and watchful it isn't talking so much about vigilance as it is about field of vision. Christ calls us to keep our eyes focused on more than just ourselves; to love others as we ourselves wish to be loved. The wise Jewish scholar, Abraham Heschel, has said that true persons of faith have the ability to hold God and humanity in a single thought. It is that type of dual focus that marks Advent watchfulness. And it is in this spiritual vigilance that we remember that history matters. That all that has happened, is happening and will happen is intimately connected with God's hopes and plans for humankind. And we are a part of those plans, especially if we can stay alert, and watchful for the ways Jesus is showing us that he indeed is the hope and light of the world.

Prayer: Pray the words of the Lord's Prayer saying one phrase at a time and then pausing to reflect on the ways it invites Advent watchfulness.

Contributed by: Rev. Paul Barrett

Monday December 3, 2018

Hope

Exodus 13:21-22

“By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.”

I've seen a pillar of fire before. A large propane tank exploded in a field in front of me, shooting fire 40 feet in the air, sounding like a jet engine. It was a compelling, riveting scene - hard to miss and difficult to ignore.

What would that have been like for God's people, wandering in the cold, dark desert, to have had this dramatic, physical, and visible sign of God's presence in front of them night after night? Did it provide reassurance, or did it scare them? Did they get tired of having a bright light burning all night, interfering with their sleep? Did they question the direction the light illuminated and think there was a better way to go?

There have been times in my life when God's presence has been palpable and so real that I could hardly deny it or dismiss it. Yet even with those experiences, I can find myself being anxious about the future, feeling alone and directionless, or choosing to ignore the light God seems to be shedding on my path and stumbling off into the wilderness on my own.

Prayer: God, help me remember that you are reliable, you don't go away, but are always in front of me, leading the way. Give me eyes to see your light, even when it's less dramatic than a towering pillar of fire, and the willingness and obedience to follow where you direct.

Contributed by: Laura Hanley

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

Hope

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

~ Psalm 119:105

**The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world. ~
John 1:9**

John's gospel begins by identifying Jesus as "the Word." So the Word of God that Old Testament writers described as a lamp and a light has now taken on flesh and become a living, illuminating, presence in our world. All teachers know the value of bringing words to life with a tangible, concrete example. Jesus is surely that — the Word of God in the flesh — but as I consider the promise John's declaration holds out to us, I recognize that he is much more.

Have you ever been "enlightened" about something? Maybe it was understanding a math problem or being given a new piece of information that changed your perspective on a subject. There is that "Oh I see" moment when you are often both relieved and exhilarated because something has fallen into place. The promise of John's verse to us is that Jesus, the true light, comes into the world to enlighten us all.

C.S. Lewis said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else". To me that captures the essence of what it means to be enlightened — seeing the world in light of Jesus. When I see by that light, everything changes. That light not only draws me to God, but, if I follow him, draws me after him into the world, a world lit by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus — truly, to use a popular phrase, an alternate universe.

Prayer: Shine, Jesus, shine! Enlighten me. Enlighten us all and help us to follow you into the newly illumined world.

Contributed by: Heather Callow

Wednesday December 5, 2018

Hope

Psalm 91:1-2, 11

Those who dwell in the shelter of Infinite Light, who abide in the wings of Infinite Love, will raise their voices in praise: My refuge and my strength; in You alone I will trust. For You have sent angels to watch over me, to guide me in all ways. (*Psalms for Praying*, by Nan Merrill)

Love and Light have long been my names for God. So, as I read over this psalm, with my mind toward Advent, I am reminded of my faithful breath prayer, "Fill me Love, with your Light." And I am called to stop and sit with my prayer for a few quiet moments. Simply breathing simply praying. Breathing in "fill me Love" and breathing out, "with your Light." Praying, "fill me Love with your Light." And slowly the breath and the prayer lead me to Mary. I imagine her as she faces the truth of her condition. I imagine her in her fear and lowliness being brave enough to say yes to the Love that is growing in her, strong enough to say yes to the Light she will bring to the world, inspired enough to say yes to her call, trusting enough that the angels will guide her to do what she can to make a difference in a dark and hurting world. I am humbled by her courage. I am in awe of her strength. I am inspired by her trust. I am delighted she believed the angels would guide her.

And in my admiration for Mary, I too begin to ponder. What are my angels guiding me toward this Advent season? Where might I bring Light and Love into a dark and hurting world? What question is waiting for my yes? So far it has been saying yes to writing a devotion. And it feels good to have said yes. Even a small yes. I am expectant that more opportunities will present in the days to come. I pray I have courage enough to say yes.

Prayer: Fill me Love, with your Light.

Contributed by: Lynn Taylor

Thursday, December 6, 2018

Hope

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

I think we each have a small or large story inside of us...A story that proclaims God's mighty acts in our life. The quiet story of how we came to follow Christ from childhood, or the incredible story of healing that still brings us to tears, the amazing story of following Christ and leaving our addiction, and/or the story of a growing struggling faith over time, that we finally relent and say "I will follow you Jesus". We each have a story of God's mighty acts in our life.

Advent is the wondrous season where we get to share these stories again...as Peter says, "In order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who call you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Wouldn't it be good for our soul, as we prepare for the birth of Christ, if we took the time to remember and proclaim His mighty acts in our life again...to ourselves, to our family, our children, grandchildren, friends, and church community.

Mine would start with... "By the grace of God, I was saved".

Prayer: May we be called out of the darkness Lord into your marvelous light this season...amen, and amen.

Contributed by: Devon Singh-Barrett

Friday, December 7, 2018

Hope

Psalm 18:28

For you will light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.

Unlike portions of Isaiah or Micah, Psalm 18 isn't exactly Christmas-y. The Psalmist describes turbulent struggles and a thundering God who is "my strength," "my rock," "my fortress," "my deliverer," "my shield," "the horn of my salvation," and "my stronghold." But the Psalmist also declares: God is the lighter of candles. This is where I start thinking about advent and Christmas. God lights the candles on our advent wreathes. He walks with us in our waiting for the baby Jesus. He enlightens our darkness and brings us the light of the world in His son Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for lighting our candles and bringing light to the darkness. Help us in this busy season to follow your light and reflect that light to those around us, as we prepare for the coming of your son.

Contributed by: Elizabeth Logan

Saturday, December 8, 2018

Advent Wreath for Week Two: Peace

Light two purple candles.

The second candle is the candle of Peace. Isaiah tells us that this peace is found in a child, one who's presence will bind all hearts and minds and bid our envy and strife to cease. May this light shine in us!

Discuss: What does Immanuel mean (Matthew 1:23)? How do you remember that God is always with you? When and where do you best experience God's peace? What does it mean to you that we serve the prince of peace?

Object: Greeting Card

Activity: God calls us to be peacemakers. One way we can do this is by bringing comfort to others who may be sad, hurting, lonely or sick. Individually or as a family, create at least one or more "signs of peace." Decide who in your life could use a sign of peace this season and use the greeting card to send them a message. You can be the light of Jesus by showing peace to others.

Pray: Pray together as a household/ family paying special attention to each person's prayer requests. Ask for God to show you opportunities to bring God's peace to earth today.

Prayer: God thank you for the gift of peace. We pray that we can appreciate peace when we experience it and that we can bring more peace to the world we live in. Amen.

Contributed by: Anna Sudeth

Sunday, December 9, 2018



Sunday, December 9, 2018

Peace

Isaiah 11:1-10 ~ Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”. Matthew 3:1-2

Why is John the Baptist always invited to our Advent parties in the church? He's like a street preacher shouting about sin and repentance from our front porch just as we're sitting down to a nice Christmas dinner. He's there, pacing around in his animal skin tunic and his purist diet of locusts, wild honey and raw foods, disturbing all our comfortable, annual rituals of the Christmas season. Why is that?

Accountability. John's word for accountability is repentance. For John, repentance is less about falling to your knees before God, and more about what happens when you get back up again. Repentance is about coming to our senses, about recognizing in full and honest clarity what we've done that we might not have done.

True repentance requires follow-through. In tennis you never stop the racquet right at the point of contact; you have to continue to swing through the ball. From a faith perspective, remorse and repentance are part of the process, but the entire act continues in the follow-through. John is relentless in asking us about our follow-through, asking us about the good deeds we will do and the changed lives we will now lead as people of the kingdom of heaven. For it is this type of accountable repentance that marks us as people who understand what all the fuss is about during this time of year – people who tremble to imagine God comes near to us in the Christ-child, tremble to think that heaven descends over all people with a light and a justice and a righteousness we have no hope of living up to except by grace and grace alone.

As we sit in front of the fireplace, and listen to Christmas carols, in the background we'll inevitably hear John the Baptist shouting out his relentless version of holiday cheer. Listen and follow-through.

Prayer: Gracious God, teach me again about your accountability that is repentance so that I might experience the peace and fullness of what it means to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Paul Barrett

Monday, December 10, 2018

Peace

John 12:35-36

Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness you do not know where you are going. While you have light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

Jesus spoke these words to his followers alerting them to his impending death. Jesus was light to their lives, instructing, consoling, healing, and loving them. When he was gone, his followers would have to be light to one another. Now, these many years later, we have to be light to one another. We have to be the sort of light that the darkness cannot overcome. Especially we need to be peacemakers in a time of discord in our communities, nation and the world.

How do we do this as frail individuals? We seek out the light of Jesus through prayer and study. We work in solidarity with others. We reach out to the light bearers in our midst, those who shine with the love of God and inspire and support those around them. I find these 'children of light' right here at St. Peter's by the Sea. What a gift!

Prayer. *Gracious and merciful God, give us the strength to surround ourselves with the teachings and followers of Jesus and strive to light the way for others, bringing peace and healing as we go. Amen.*

Contributed by: Ruth Lohrer

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Peace

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

My wife, Carol, and I dated for five years and celebrate our 53rd wedding anniversary today December 11, 2018. Here is an advent devotional and prayer written for you and us.

Confidence “that he who has begun a good work in you will carry it on” is light itself. Light which provides warmth and visibility for seeing and knowing. Life has zigs and zags and is full of ups and downs and the light of hope may see us through. Knowing we are on journey to completion may peacefully settle us. May it be so.

May our hope filled hearts and footsteps be leading us to completion as we walk along with the “Trinity.” Our way is to be lit footstep by lit footstep and heartbeat by heartbeat for us to see and know. And for us to be seen providing light to others along the way.

Let what has begun give you and I hope and faith to see it through till done. Let what has begun, light your and my way, each knowing it is the Trinity that has seen us here and will see us through till completion.

Our Prayer: May we confidently in light do our part loving each other and loving our journey to completion. Amen and Amen.

Contributed by: Dave Milam

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Peace

Advent hymn by: Bernadette Farrell

“Christ, be our Light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our Light!

Shine in your church gathered today.”

This is a wonderful prayer for Advent or anytime, really. Acknowledging that we have no light of our own except for that given us through Jesus is a humbling and yet freeing, thought.

The power of the light of Jesus far surpasses that of the sun or even the blinding light of lasers or any other man-made light. Forgive me when I try to shine on my own. Make me a channel of your light, Lord, offering a safe place for others to come to your light. May we at St. Peters be a light to each other that reaches into our community and around the darkened world.

Prayer: Lord, continue to shine in our hearts today and always.

Contributed by: Lenita Witherspoon

Peace

John 3

In the Latin we say “adventus,” in the Greek we say “parousia,” and in the Hebrew we say “afikomenos” (derived from Greek) to mean “the coming one” or “he who has come,” as applied to the period just before Christmas. There is, of course, the remaining challenge ... understanding what it means. Do we understand?

In the search for understanding we might consider an obscure moment in the third chapter of John as we come upon the character Nicodemus for the first time. Nicodemus, traveling by night, spiritually in the dark, is looking for the Jesus that everyone is talking about. The encounter between the two gives the early impression that the chance meeting is of little importance. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, was simply curious and wanted to know more about Jesus.

Yet, we find we are like Nicodemus ... we come to Jesus with our questions, struggling to know what it all means ... looking for that elusive understanding that we crave. Jesus tells Nicodemus, and us, what we hunger to know. He says, “... no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again.” Like Nicodemus, we are stunned into silence. Understanding seems to slip away, what does it mean, we think? But there is a hint in the answer Jesus gives ... it has something to do with “seeing.” If we are spiritually in the dark and “seeing” is critical to our understanding ... we need light and Jesus provides that too. Again, in John Jesus speaks to us the understanding we seek in his prescription for “seeing” the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells us where understanding comes from, “**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in (spiritual) darkness but will have the light of life.**”

Now we have the question, the answer and the understanding. Christmas is about the arrival of Jesus. Jesus is coming, he is coming indeed ... to each person who chooses the light ... who chooses to be born again ... with him. Our physical birth is the beginning of our becoming ... our sanctification ... our joining Jesus ... our becoming “born again.”

We await the coming of Jesus Christ, delivered by light, and born again in each one who follows the light.

Prayer: Jesus ... we wait patiently for the light of understanding ... illuminate our hearts so all that know us will see you within us. Your search light is our beacon ... know that we are coming too ... your faithful ones.

Friday, December 14, 2018

Peace

Psalm 121

I lift my eyes up to the hills—from where does my help come?.. He will not let your foot be moved; ... the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.... The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Advent was nigh—a season of wonder and renewal in the hope, joy, love and peace God grants us in the Christmas gift of the Incarnation. But with the reality of the harshness of our world this Autumn, I couldn't quite make it to Advent last weekend—my own sense of advent was too eager—I needed to be surrounded by wonder and light. Why not a daytrip to Yosemite? Radical to road trip 5 hours each way?

The brilliance of lingering stars greeted me in the predawn darkness, and as I headed east, the rising sun peeked over the foothills. Midday as I hiked up to Glacier Point, the light danced, sparkling atop the Merced. It was a stunningly beautiful day—the pine trees ever fragrant, clear skies, friendly hikers from all over the world, and a granite cocoon of awe restoring me. As the sun set heading back west through the Central Valley, I realized light had framed my going out and coming in for the day.

This psalm reminds me of God's presence above us, alongside of us, and within us—always. It's easier for me to feel that in Advent and Christmas with all the wonder of the season. It's harder though in the extended seasons of advent we find ourselves in throughout the year, wondering how hope, joy, love and peace may be made incarnate in our world.

In this season of Advent, I wonder how we may serve as light for others we encounter in our goings out and comings in of our daily lives? What might that radically require of us? What wonder might it also gift and restore in us?

Prayer: God of Light—fill us with your hope, joy, love, and peace this Advent and in our unique seasons of advent forevermore in the new year. Amen.

Contributed by: Molly Logan

Saturday, December 15, 2018

Advent Wreath Week Three: *Joy*

Light three purple candles.

The third candle is the candle of joy, the joy that we experience when we discover this Savior for ourselves. May His light continue to shine in all our lives this day and always!

Discuss: Why were the angels singing to the shepherds? Why can you give thanks and rejoice this season? Name three things you are excited about and thankful for this Christmas.

Object: Jingle Bells

Activity: The Savior of the world was born over 2,000 years ago. Jesus was and is the best Christmas present—a true reason to REJOICE. Ring the jingle bells, sing a Christmas carol together. Make music and thank God for Jesus.

Pray: Pray in different ways this week. Shout out your joys! Pray the words of Joy to the World. Sing your prayers of thanks to God.

Prayer: God thank you for the gift of joy. Sometimes we get stuck in a sad place and forget the joy you give us. We pray that we see and express joy, especially as we celebrate the birth of Jesus! Amen.

Contributed by: Anna Sudeth

Sunday, December 16, 2018



Sunday, December 16, 2018

Joy

Isaiah 35:1-10 ~ Matthew 11:2-11

John said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” ~Matthew 11:3

If there was anyone who had appeared to be certain about who Jesus was, and when he was coming, it was John the Baptist. Every single one of the gospels begins with John absolutely certain that what he says about the Messiah will come true. Every word from John’s mouth sounds unconditional, resolute and steadfast. And just as John promises, Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized, and the heavens declare him “beloved child of God.”

Then as soon as Jesus shows up, John disappears. It is not until Jesus’ ministry is well underway, that we meet up with John again when the uncompromising prophet is in prison. And his once sure declaration has given way to an aching question: “Are you the One to come, or are we to wait for another?”

Are you the One to come, or are we to wait for another? That is sometimes our question, too, isn’t it? Is Jesus the One we are looking for? And if he is, why does he seem so elusive? Is his coming kingdom ever going to really come and transform this weary world of ours?

Our questions do not fall upon deaf ears.

When Isaiah proclaims the coming of God, he points to the natural world and to the broken human family inhabiting it, saying: God is coming here. And when John the Baptist asks his honest question of Jesus, “Are you the One to come, or are we to look for another?” – remember what Jesus says in response. Jesus harkens back to Isaiah saying: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”

Prayer: Loving God, in a world that seems on the edge of peril give me a taste, a vision of your holiness found in my union with Jesus Christ – the joy and light of the world. Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Paul Barrett

Monday, December 17, 2018

Joy

Jeremiah 29:11

For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

I was blessed to be born into a small tightknit loving and loyal family. We had our ups and downs like all families, many moves, many challenges. Yet no matter what, I knew, I know that I'm loved and either Mom, Dad, Terry or Brad would always have my back. My parents used to joke I had four parents.

My world shattered five years ago when Brad passed away at age 58, on the second anniversary of our Dad's passing. Later that day, Terry got in a horrific car accident. Miraculously, Terry survived.

Thanks be to God that the blessing of family surrounded me upon getting that traumatic news. Robert, Rick and Scott were all at home for all of us to huddle up with our group hugs, tears of sorrow and heart beats of love, loyalty and strength.

Thanks be to God to my family at St. Peter's. The individual friends, small groups, Stephen Ministry, warmth and smiles on the patio. Each of you contributed to my healing in your own unique warm and loving way. I am grateful to all of you. Thank you!

Prayer: God, thank you for the gift of a loving family. May all of us know always, your love everlasting. Amen.

Contributed by: Pam Barclay

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

Joy

Matthew 5:14 & 16

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. In the same way you should let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven.

The first Bible verse that I decided to memorize was Matthew 5:14,16. I was eight years old, and realized that God created ME (and YOU) to share His light with the world. It hit me. That my behavior could either show His love to others or cause them to retreat away. That the way I lived could impact someone so deeply, that they would ask me, WHY do I choose to live this way. And then I could tell them about God, and all He has done for me. Woah. It's that simple. The way we live, could be so other than what our culture does, that others would be curious as to WHY we are the way we are. Why do we carry such hope. Such joy. Such kindness. Such gentleness. Such tenderness. Are you hearing the fruits of the spirit... hint hint. That in our living, God works out his plan for salvation. We need not worry about the how, He will make a way. We need only to live obediently in Love, and in doing so, His light will be seen in our world.

Prayer: Dear God, quiet our hearts and bring us humbly into your presence. Remind us that sharing your light is simple. That when we allow you to change our heart, the love will shine through in all we do. Thank you for your love.

Contributed by: Colleen Cox

Wednesday, December 19, 2018

Joy

Every generous act of giving is from above.

~James 1:17

Every year as I am shopping for the people on my Christmas gift list, I try to figure out the best gift I could get each person. Not the most expensive, but the gift which meets a need of the recipient. As they open the carefully wrapped box or dig into the gift bag ...upon seeing the gift, they think... wow – she knows me, was listening to me or really understands me.

I bet God was thinking all those years ago ...how can I bring Light into this world... what can I give to my children which will help them find their faith? God, who could provide us with anything, gave us his son - Jesus the Light of the World. Our God knows us, he understands us and listens to our prayers. I think he gave us the Perfect Gift.

Prayer: Lord, have mercy on us. Thank you for giving us your son, The Light of the Word and the Perfect Gift. Help us to be generous in thought, word and deed throughout the Advent Season and beyond.

Contributed by: Debbie Veale

Thursday, December 20, 2018

Joy

Psalm: 139: 11-12

**If I say, let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night
even the darkness is not dark to thee the night is bright as the day for
darkness is as light with thee.**

Ahhhh, light. Isn't that what we're searching for in this Advent season? For it is surely dark outside. The days grow short and the news is not good. Countries against countries, brother against brother. Some days we huddle together shivering and wondering when the darkness will end.

But the psalmist tells us to look to God....whose night is bright as day and who makes darkness light. God sent us light in the person of a tiny baby. A baby born into a time as dark as ours, a time of cruelty and repression and fear. That baby was born and thrived and spread light to all he met. He lit up the darkness of his world and spread his message of love and inclusiveness to everyone he encountered.

Carry the light of Jesus with you throughout this Advent time. Let him light up the dark corners of your life and shine his light ahead of you for others to follow.

Prayer: I pray that Heaven's light in the form of a baby will cast out fear and doubt and make us celebrate God's goodness to us. Amen.

Friday, December 21, 2018

Joy

Lamentations 3:22-23

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

The other day I was driving with my daughter and a song came on the radio. I wasn't paying much attention to the lyrics until I heard the line, "Nobody speaks to God these days". That caught my attention, and I blurted out, "I do!". I said, "I talk to God every night, well...like actually every day and night, well...actually multiple times a day; with co-workers, by myself, with friends". "Wow...I guess I talk to God A LOT!". I then laughed out loud, listening to myself go on and on.

My daughter told me the song was from the new movie "A Star Is Born". She asked why I hadn't gone to see it yet, and I explained that from what I could remember, the original movie with Kris Kristofferson and Barbara Streisand, destroyed me, and lately I haven't felt like going to see an extremely emotional movie that would make me sad and cry my eyes out. I told her I'd wait for Netflix.

I thought to myself, why is it that I don't feel like seeing a 'tear-jerker' right now? Why is it that I don't want to intentionally put myself in an environment of intense darkness? I mulled over that thought and then it hit me...I am feeling extreme JOY these days! My daughter is about to give birth to a son, our first grandson. Any day, night, minute, second, I expect 'the call'. *I have been 'waiting' on him* and talking to God about his impending birth. It's a lot like Advent I decided. Waiting on the birth of our savior; waiting and pausing, anticipating that moment he is here; remembering that feeling of *indescribable JOY and LIGHT* and the love that follows. It's unexplainable. Yet, it overpowers every fiber of your being and envelopes your soul. May you experience some amount of this phenomenal LIGHT, JOY, AND LOVE during Advent and Christmas this year, especially if you've never felt it, or haven't felt it in a long while.

Prayer: Lord, your mercies are new every day! Comfort those who need it most this Advent Season. Amen.

Contributed by: Kathi Moen (aka Mia)

Advent Wreath this Week: *Love*

Light four purple candles.

The fourth candle is the candle of love, God's love made flesh in a Savior for us all. While our love is often filled with limitations and conditions, the light of God's love shines forever!

Discuss: How does the Bible say we should treat others? What parts of loving people are easy for you? What parts are hard for you? What is a way you can share God's love this week?
Amen.

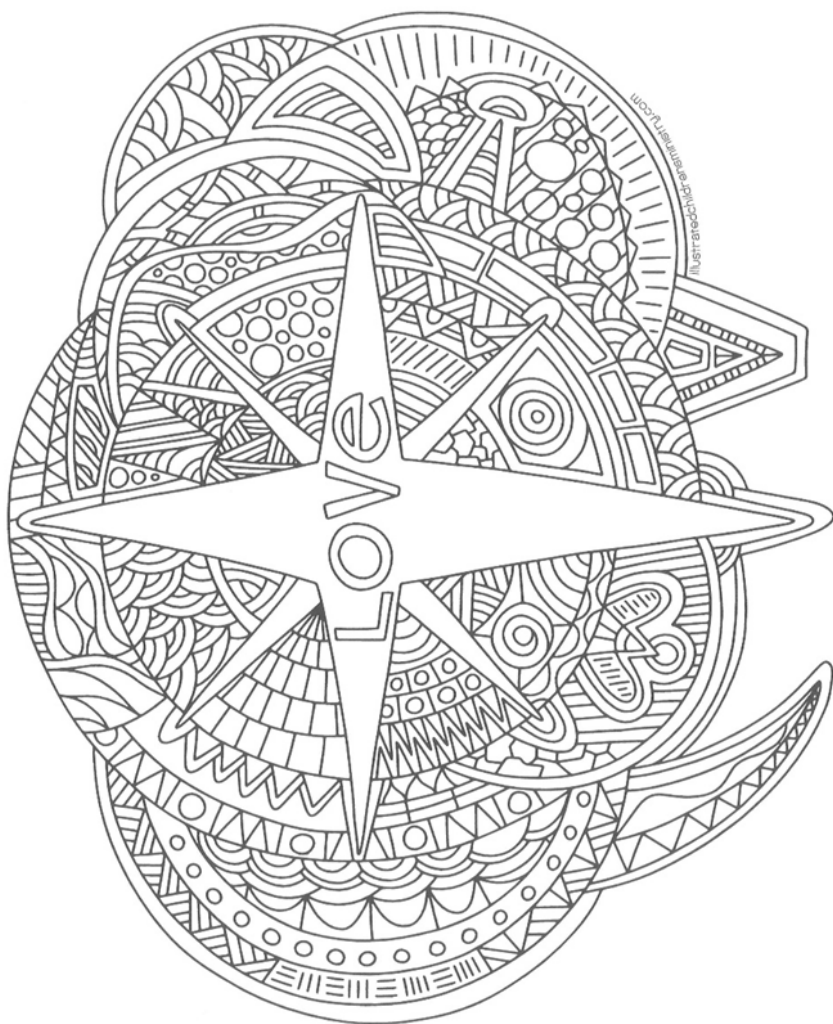
Object: Cookie Cutter

Activity: What is the shape of your cookie cutter? How does this shape remind you of Jesus' birth or the Gospel (you may need to get creative). Use your cookie cutter to make cookies and share them with someone you think needs to experience extra love right now.

Pray: Thank God for all the ways you experience God's love. Pray for people you know may be lonely or not feeling love right now.

Prayer: God thank you for the gift of your love. We don't always love the way we should. Remind us of the love you showed the world by sending Jesus. Help us to love others and show them your love through our actions.

Sunday, December 23, 2018



Sunday, December 23, 2018

Emmanuel

Isaiah 10:7-16 ~ Matthew 1:1-25

Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us. ~Matthew 1:23

Names matter. That’s why when Matthew sat down to write his gospel, he began with a genealogy. That long list of names is meant to remind us that all that has gone before is still a part of this Christmas story. And just as all those prior generations prayed to God for salvation, now a story is told about a long-awaited child born in a manger called Emmanuel, which literally means “God with us.”

Names matter: Emmanuel – “God-with-us.”

“God with us” is both a name and an unconditional promise. It is spoken without an expiration date or qualifying clauses. “God with us” now and forever. “God with us” whoever we are, wherever we are, however we find ourselves at this very moment.

In the famous verse from the first chapter of John’s gospel, it says “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Eugene Peterson’s The Message bible translates that line by saying, “And the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.”

Imagine that to be true for your life and then remember this: Jesus called “Emmanuel,” God-with-us, is the same risen Lord who in Matthew 28 sends us out into the world to teach, baptize, comfort and love as he has loved us saying to us directly “I am with you always to the end of the age.” We are not alone. We are called **beloved** by the one who loves us. We are called **disciples** by the one who is the way, truth and life. We are called **home** by the one who welcomes every prodigal. We are called **church** by the One who dwells in our neighborhood. Jesus Emmanuel, is with us this day and always. Remember those names, because they matter.

Prayer: Jesus Emmanuel – God with us, God with me – thank you for loving me and knowing my name. May the choices I make this day give glory and honor to your name that is above every name. Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Paul Barrett

Monday, December 24, 2018

Christmas Eve

Matthew 2:1-12

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

It may have been just Mary and Joseph, who were there that first Christmas when Jesus was born, and a little later the shepherds from the fields led by angel choruses to see this thing that had happened. But when the Magi got there this little, intimate family story of new birth, was opened up for all the world to see. The Wise Men from afar are the ones who represent us at the manger. The important thing the Magi teach us is not just where they came from, but how they departed and made their way home. By another way, Matthew tells us.

That's how it is supposed to be for us too. Once we have been to the manger, and knelt before the Christ Child, we are never the same again. Once we see that the great God of all creation is born among us, God's love for the world appearing in the ordinary lives of ordinary people, we go home a different way. We walk by a light not of this world.

It was St. Francis of Assisi who first created a live nativity in 1223 in a humble outdoor setting. It was also St. Francis who penned the prayer that speaks of the path we take after we have knelt before Jesus:

“Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace, where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.... For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

St. Francis understood how coming to the manger, of the Lord changes us. It makes us more Christ-like in how we live, and we are directed home by another way transformed by the light of the world.

Prayer: Loving God, on this most holy of nights take me to the manger again. Be born anew in me. May I humbly follow you after I have knelt before Jesus. Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Paul Barrett

Tuesday, December 25, 2018

Advent Wreath : Christmas Eve/Christmas Day

Light four purple candles and the center white candle.

Today we light the Christ Candle that reminds us of the light Jesus brought to earth ... it is Jesus's birthday candle!

Discuss: How did the Magi celebrate the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:11)? Why do you think they chose those gifts? What is special about the birth of Jesus? How do you celebrate your birthday? How can you help remember that the most important thing to celebrate today is the birth of Jesus?

Object: Birthday Candle

Activity: This candle represents our celebration for the birth of Jesus, our Savior! You can light this candle and sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, or even make him a cake or birthday card.

Pray: Thank God that Jesus was born for YOU! Rejoice and celebrate!

Prayer: God, thank you for the amazing gift of your son, Jesus. Help us to focus this Christmas on the light he brings to the world that we can share with everyone around us. May we remember the true gift of today is our relationship with you. Amen.

Wednesday, December 26, 2018

Love

Isaiah 60: 1-2

**Arise, shine, for your light has come,
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people;
But the Lord will arise upon you,
And his glory will appear over you.**

These words, familiar to many from Handel's *Messiah*, are full of the love that God chose to pour out on us in the birth of Jesus. In our present life they speak as strongly as they did in Isaiah's time. They are words of hope, of consolation when we have lost our way, when we don't know which way to turn. They bring assurance of God's protection and everlasting provision for our very lives. These are words that far transcend our feeble attempts at celebrating the event with our Christmas rituals of giving and decorating. They are words that stretch the mind and imagination as we consider this great gift of light and glory. Let us arise and shine forth with the reflection of this light given so generously to all by our gracious God.

Prayer: Gracious God of Light- fill us with your Hope, Peace, **Joy, and Love** that we may be all you have gifted us to be. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Contributed by: Lenita Witherspoon

Thursday, December 27, 2018

Silent Night, Holy Night All is Calm, All is Bright

Last year we did something entirely different for Christmas and went to Hawaii! In recent years our traditions have changed. We have not quite figured out what our new normal is, so we decided to go. Plus, it's the traditional place to go for rest, rejuvenation and fun. An extra plus, we'd be there to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary! All things merry and bright.

What I did not expect was, I missed my family at St. Peter's a lot! On Christmas Eve we went to one of our favorite places, great view, great food and always cheerful servers. Fortunately, it's within a hotel and I knew if the timing was right, we'd be able to attend the worship service that a local church was sponsoring. We were greeted – Aloha, warmly and enthusiastically, followed by a very heartfelt Merry Christmas! Though we were in a huge ballroom it was feeling like home – warm, cheerful, sincere – it was feeling like St. Peter's. All was calm, and all was bright. Memories of the past came to heart and mind. Gratitude and calm rushed through me. All is calm, and all is bright....

Prayer: Heavenly Father throughout this Advent season and in all my days, may I know all the places is where we find you and your creation, all is calm, all is bright. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Contributed by: Pam Barclay

Friday, December 28, 2018

~ God's Special Possession ~

Love

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

How often do you consider yourself God's special possession? God chose you. He, himself, came down into darkness to be with you because he loves you...WOW! When I replace the word you with the word me, that can be overwhelming. God chose me...WOW!

He did this that we might come into his wonderful light. That we might take that light and shine it brightly, so others would be called out of darkness and into his wonderful light. Think about the words in this scripture... chosen, royal, holy, special. How often do we consider ourselves any of those when speaking about or living out our relationship with God? He considers us that daily. And, he considers those we are in fellowship with the same.

Change can be hard. Change can cause dark places in our lives. John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." May we live lives of such brightness that it is impossible for darkness to overcome us.

So, how often do you consider yourself God's special possession? My hope is you now consider it daily!

Prayer: Gracious and loving Heavenly Father, thank you for choosing me! May I allow your light to shine through me in such a manner that, even when words fail me, I may declare daily the praises of you who called me out of darkness into your wonderful light, in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Contributed by: Pam Dunbar

Saturday, December 29, 2018

Love

John 1:1-5

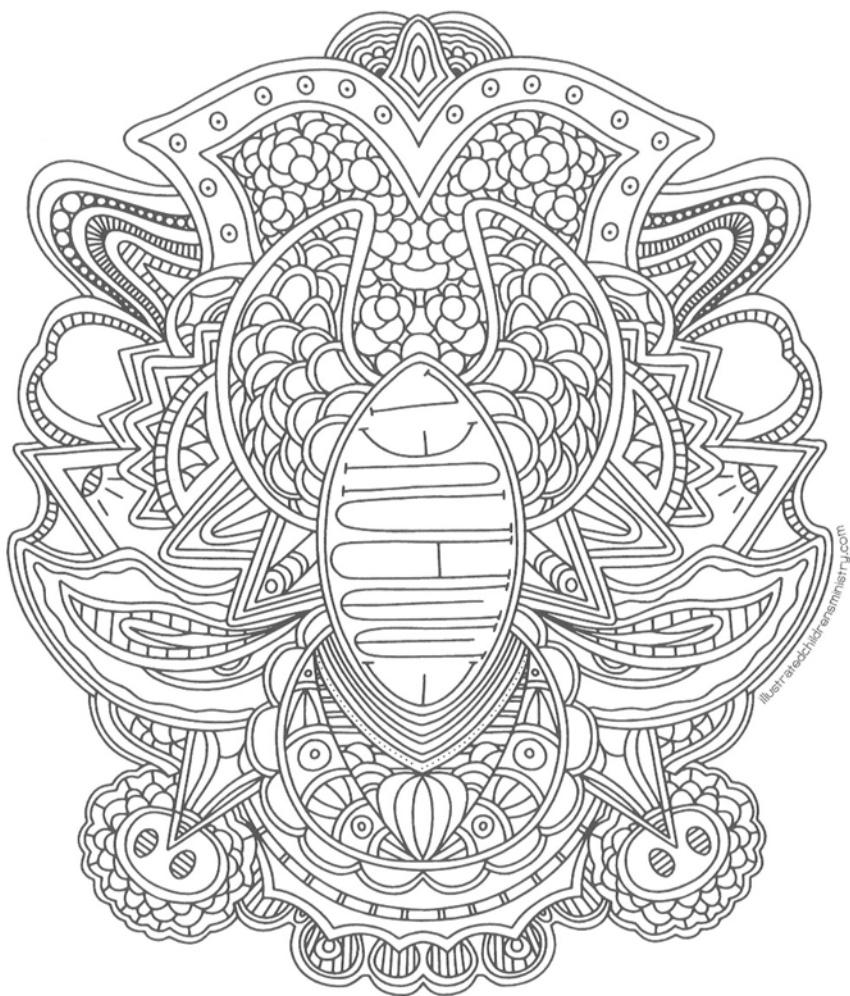
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

These words always evoke a powerful image in my mind's eye. I see the darkness of creation and then a single light, the light of Jesus, as Word, as thought, in the mind of God overpowers ALL the darkness that existed. I take heart that a single candle can light a whole room enough to make a way through it without stumbling. I rejoice that a single shining light can change the course of history. I am awed by the whole process that brought Jesus to earth among us. I am grateful beyond belief for light. Yet I recognize that it is not always easy to be "in the light", that sometimes my actions are not worthy of the light. With God's grace there is forgiveness and a return to the worthiness of the light.

Prayer: Praise God for the gift of light in Jesus Christ! Amen.

Contributed by: Lenita Witherspoon

Sunday, December 30, 2018



Sunday, December 30, 2018

God with us

Matthew 2:13-23; Is 63: 7-9

At a time when I couldn't muster up much hope for my future, a friend asked me to recall times when something good happened that had seemed impossible. Was there a time when an unspoken dream became reality against all odds, or an unlikely venture succeeded? I quickly named examples. Then the challenge came, "If God could bring about those things in your past, couldn't God do something wonderfully beyond your imagination in the future?" I found the Light of Hope for my undefined future in my "Yes!"

When the angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with the child Jesus and his mother, where did these parents find strength to immediately run into the night? Did they muster courage for the terrifying escape by reminding each other of God's unmoving faithfulness, extravagant love and lavish compassion? They could've counted among God's gifts: An against-the-odds commitment to their marriage; a safe place for a birth far from home; the wondrous company of shepherds who'd left precious flocks to see one who'd be called "God-with-us"; the brilliant starlight that led the wise to worship the savior and then return home without reporting to Herod the hater; and even some time together as a young family before the assassins came.

The prophet Isaiah urges us to remember what the Lord has done for us, to seek the Lord's presence in all our days, and to see our savior-redeemer as "God-with-us." Let us say, "Yes!"

Prayer: Lord, I make a list of the many wondrous things you have done for me, and I thank you. Be my Light and constant companion in the days ahead. I pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Barbara Buck

Monday, December 31, 2018

Emmanuel

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as God's chosen people – holy and dearly loved – clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Clothing is very personal. It covers the real us, and projects an image to others of how we want to be seen. Successful? Fashionable? Chic? Sexy? Colorful? Sporty? Stylish? Approachable? Businesslike? Fun? Wealthy? Flirty?

Religion is very personal. But it doesn't cover us. It is the closet within us. And every day, we reach into that closet and personally select our wardrobe and accessories for the day.

What image do we want to project? How do we want to be seen? Compassionate? Kind? Humble? Gentle? Patient? Or...?

Today, I think I will pick approachable *and* compassionate. Tomorrow? Maybe, sporty *and* humble.

Prayer: Dear God, today, may I wear a selection of clothing that both attracts others to me, and enables them to see the joys of living a holy, and dearly-loved, life. Amen.

Contributed by: Bill Chillingworth

Tuesday, January 1, 2019

Emmanuel

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Have you ever come into your home and you couldn't find the light switch? Did you feel a little lost? Maybe you were even a little bit disoriented. Did you ask yourself "how can this be as I've traveled these stairs or this entrance a million times?"

Maybe you've even had days where the path of your life was full of twists and turns....where it felt dark and foreboding and even overwhelming? Health issues; work issues; relationship issues – they all can cause our path to become dark; foreboding and even frightening.

We often hear the phrase – "throw a light on" when we are seeking and answer or an explanation. Unfortunately, not all things are easily explained or understood and yet our faith teaches us that the LIGHT is always with us. That light was present in the Star over Bethlehem and the LIGHT of Jesus is still with us even today. As we celebrate the Advent Season, what a gift to know that this light continues to shine day in and day out and it has been freely given to each one of us.

Prayer: Lord, help us to seek your light and to remember that you will always illuminate the pathway if we but turn to you. Amen.

Contributed by: Dorothy Farris

Wednesday, January 2, 2019

Emmanuel

1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

How do you feel as your heart turns to look at your loved ones – a spouse, child, grandchild? Don't you glow and feel warmth inside? You smile inside and out – you light up! God sent us His Son! That is a dazzling display of love and light! Awe – beyond my words!!

I know in our community of St. Peter's we know how to love. We do it well when friends and family call or are in need. We give very generously. As we have enjoyed another Advent season filled with love and light may we reach out to our community that is still struggling, hungry and hurting. We know all the rough and tumble of the world around us. It's ugly!! Let's make the season of Advent last ALL year-long! Let us be the light that the Wise Men followed until they reached Emanuel – showering gifts upon a poor child born in a manger.

We are a community full of wealth, knowledge and abilities – let us share our gifts all year long and be a light to the community who so desperately needs more light.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for showing us a lighted path to your kingdom through your son Jesus. He is the light in our hearts for us to shine out upon the world. May we be brighter each day going forward.

Contributed by: Valerie Ryan

Thursday, January 3, 2019

Emmanuel

1 John 1: 5-7

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

When I was 7 years old my eyes started changing. By age 10 I was sure I was going to go blind by age 12. It was frightening. I was scared that my world was growing blurrier to the point of darkness. I told myself I had to prepare for this dark world that was headed my way. I started to memorize sheet music, so I could continue to play the piano for years to come. I started walking around the house in the dark carefully memorizing how many steps to the door, to the table, to the piano. I would even sit in the dark listening to my vinyl albums, so I could get use to the how music could still speak to me...even in the dark. But this was all a lie I had been telling myself. I actually wasn't going blind.

Before I turned 13, my eyes stopped changing, and I had to get use to the strong prescription in my eyeglasses. Darkness faded to light. I started turning on the lights in the room. I found new sheet music to learn. And I found these verses from 1 John 1:5-7.

I realized how much I enjoyed light. Life seemed fuller in the light. There was fellowship in the light. There was meaning in the light.

And then I realized that it was the Light of Jesus that ignited my life. It was in Jesus that I found truth. It was through Jesus that I found real fellowship with others.

Prayer: Lord of Light, hear the cry of my heart. Help me to live out the words of this song: "I want to be in the Light, as you are in the Light. I want to shine like the stars in the heavens. Oh, Lord be my Light and be my salvation cause all I want is to be in the Light" (~ In the Light by DC Talk) Amen.

Contributed by: Sharon Trice

Friday, January 4, 2019

Light of the World

The lyrics to "Here I am to Worship," written by Tim Hughes and sung by Hillsong speaks directly to sacrifice and why the Light of the world is so important to us as Christians and why we should want others to come to know that Light. We don't deserve it. It's simply that we serve a God who is wonderful to us! Let's not hold so tightly to our way that someone misses the Light.

Light of the world You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You

Here I am to worship, here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that You're my God
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days oh, so highly exalted
Glorious in Heaven above
Humbly You came to the earth You created
All for love's sake became poor

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross
You're wonderful
Here I am to worship
Oh God, You're wonderful to me

(Modified for inclusion in this Advent Devotional)

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for loving us so much and stepping down into darkness. Forgive us when we extinguish your light from shining through us.

Contributed by: Pam Dunbar

Saturday, January 5, 2019

Emmanuel

Mark: 4:21

Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead don't you put it on its stand?

Every year I feel depressed in January. We have just passed through my favorite time of the year – I love the holidays! People can be kinder, gentler, loving and giving. I appreciate that there are the crazy out of control people as well – but for the most part – we see a lot of good for humanity. So, as January rolls in, generally the old pre-Advent reality comes back.

And as I was thinking about this advent devotional and my writing, it occurred to me that each year I am thrilled with the intended spirit of the season and all Advent traditions, Angel Tree, Operation Christmas Child, toy and food drives, Christmas carols and bringing comfort to those in need. Why do we as Christians, let this light be only one season of the year? We need this to last all year! We need to be the light, spirit and joy all year. I'm not just suggesting a happy face and empty platitudes, I'm suggesting a true light and source of hope to others, of joy to those who have lost their bearings or the love for life. Let's begin every day to show what God's peace can look like in someone's life for more than just one season of the year. I know this isn't easy, Jesus implied it would be tough some days.

So, you can put away your Christmas decorations in the attic or dark storage area, but you do not have to put away the light of your spirit! Shine On!!

Prayer: Abba – you sent your Son – to light up the world and show us the right path to take – not just for the month of December – for every single day – May we always walk in your light and shine brightly for others. Amen.

I hope you have enjoyed this year's Advent devotional. Thank you to all the contributors. Shine brightly when you can, pray daily, love your neighbor & Jesus will light your path.
– Valerie Ryan – editor in training :)



Light of the World

CHRISTMAS EVE AT ST. PETER'S BY THE SEA
DECEMBER 24, 2018

4 PM - CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PLAY
7 PM - MUSIC, CANDLES, & COMMUNION
9 PM - MUSIC, CANDLES, & COMMUNION

St. Peter's BY THE SEA
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
a place for you