



THE LIGHT SHINES
IN THE DARKNESS

ADVENT 2021

The Light Shines in the Darkness

Advent Devotional Guide

Readings for December 1–25, 2021

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Introduction to Advent

Dear South Family,

One of the ways I am personally helped to draw near to God is to develop particular rhythms in my life that intentionally focus my heart towards him. Some of these rhythms are daily (Word, prayer, memorization), some of these rhythms are weekly (fasting), some of these rhythms are monthly (prayer and planning days away with God), and some of these are seasons (like Advent and Lent). The goal is not legalistic perfection to carry out these things as if they are mechanical, but rather an intentionality designed to give my mind and heart time and space to remember the goodness of King Jesus to me.

I think that this is also valuable for us to develop corporately together. We gather weekly on Sundays to worship. We are beginning quarterly nights of worship and prayer. And we'll continue to make classes, community, and care available in the hopes that it will give us time and space together for our minds and hearts to remember the goodness of King Jesus to us.

With that goal in mind, we hope to have regular Advent and Lent devotional guides for our South family. This year, the theme we'll be looking at for Advent together is *The Light Shines in the*

Darkness. Here's what I wrote to the South elders about my hope for this year's theme during Advent:

I want to walk through the Bible and see the theme of God, in Christ, who is light, shining into and overcoming the darkness of the world and of dark souls to bring about new life. We live in a time when we often think about our culture in a state of fear or resignation. I want them to leave this season encouraged that our God is light, in him there is no darkness at all, and he will overcome the darkness. Therefore, they can boldly walk in the light, know that they were made for this moment, and trust that God will keep shining in them and through them until the day when darkness is vanquished for good.

May God do this and much, much more as we walk through this devotional together. One suggestion is that you'd take the day off on Saturdays (with the exception of Christmas Day) to discuss what God's been showing you from the devotional with family or friends. And we'd encourage you to consider asking unbelievers in your life to walk through this with you.

Seeking the Light with you,

Pastor Dave Zuleger

Week 1

God Speaks and Light Comes

DECEMBER 1, 2021

Devotional by Pastor Dave Zuleger

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

—Genesis 1:1

God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.—2 Corinthians 4:6

Perhaps you've felt that the darkness in this season in our country, or in our church, or in your life personally is overwhelming. Who could overcome such darkness?

Well, I want you to look back in history.

First, look back at your own life and remember that your heart was once full of only darkness. How did that change? God shone the light of Christ into your heart. You saw Jesus. You saw him as Savior who could forgive all your sins and cover all your shame. You saw him as Lord and wanted to walk away from darkness and into his light. Certainly he who began a good work in you is not done shining light into your life and will finish the good work he started to bring you into his glorious light.

Second, I want you to have hopes and prayers that are big enough for the God who has Genesis 1 on his resume. He spoke and light came into being. When he speaks, light shines into and overcomes the darkness. And this God who created all things by his word is redeeming all things by his word and all of history is moving towards a reality where we will live in his glorious light forever.

Take heart. Our God created the world by his word. And he created you as a new creation by his word. When he speaks, light comes. He is still speaking.

Prayer Reflections

1. What is one area (sin, suffering, shame) that feels darkest to you right now?
2. What is one promise of God that you can seek to apply to this darkness?
3. Bring the dark areas of the world, your heart, and your friends and family to God and ask him to speak light.

Week 1

Let There Be Light

DECEMBER 2, 2021

Devotional by Pastor Nick Roen

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.—Revelation 4:11

If you are a Christian, then you likely already know that God created everything from nothing. In Genesis 1:2, we see that one of those things that he created was light. God spoke the word of his power, and simply said, “Let there be light.” And there was light, shining through the darkness.

In John 1:14, we read that the perfect Word of God became flesh, and came to dwell among us as the God-man Jesus Christ. And just like in Genesis, what does the Word of God do? It brings forth light. John 1:4–5 says, “In him was life, and the life was the *light of men*. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

So how does the light shine in the darkness? Because Jesus, the perfect, living Word of God, came and brought light in him. To use the words of Revelation 4:11, by HIM the light exists and was created. And so we say, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power!” The light shines in the darkness because that Word came and dwelt among us.

The world we live in is dark. Really dark. But *the darkness has not overcome the light of the world!* God spoke, and there was light. And no matter what happens in our culture, our government, or our world, the darkness will not overcome the light of Jesus Christ. We have light—real light!—to share with our family members

and neighbors. And when we do that, the One who created it and brought it with him to a humble stall in Bethlehem receives all the honor and glory and power.

Prayer Reflections

1. Are there any areas where you are struggling to see the light of Christ? Are there any areas you are struggling to share that light with others?
2. Pray that God would help you to trust his creating power to create new hope, healing, boldness, and joy as you give him the glory and honor.

Week 1

Our Creator Is Infinite

DECEMBER 3, 2021

Devotional by Joshua Oakley, *Director for Children & Disability Ministries*

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.—Isaiah 40:28–29

Have you ever felt like you have an endless list of things to do and felt so overwhelmed that before you even start, you feel paralyzed? Have you found yourself in a situation that seems unsolvable and you don't know where to begin?

If you have, know that it is normal to experience this, because we are finite. We need rest and nutrition in order to continue to function and we cannot do it all alone. God himself says, “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19b).

However, for those of us who put our trust in God we do not need to attempt self-sufficiency. As we see in the next verse, “even youths shall faint and be weary, *but* those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isaiah 40.30–31, emphasis added). This draws our attention back to the promise in verse 28; namely, that our great God does not grow tired or weary, and his understanding is unfathomable. This is the same God who did the work of calling us out of darkness and into the light. This God raised Jesus from the dead in order that we might inherit an imperishable inheritance as sons and daughters.

So as the holiday season approaches with ever-increasing speed and the list of things to do pile up, let us remember that we are

finite, *but* we have a God who is infinite and he is for us, not against us, promising to never leave or forsake us.

Prayer Reflections

1. How might God be using your weakness to call you to rest in his infinite power and provision?
2. How might your drive for self-sufficiency become an idol, which keeps you from experiencing the depth of love that Christ has for you as his child?
3. How might your reliance on Christ alone for wisdom and strength point others to the eternal hope within you?

Week 2

Light for the Nations

DECEMBER 6, 2021

Devotional by Haddon Anderson, *Church Planting Resident*

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.— Isaiah 49:6

Seven hundred years before our Savior was born, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would bring God's light and salvation to the end of the earth. Praise God that the light of Christ has reached us here in the far-off land of Minnesota! The light of Christ is so powerful that it changes us into people who bring that very light to the people around us. When Jesus shines into our hearts, he transforms us so that we join in his mission of shining his light to the nations. That's why Jesus told his disciples, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew. 5:14).

All of us have friends, neighbors, and perhaps even family members who are still living in darkness. The light that they need in order to escape from the darkness is found in Jesus Christ alone. What a privilege we have to bear the light of Christ!

This Advent season, will you take time to ponder and rejoice in the light of the gospel? As you do so, allow the glorious light of Jesus to fill you with joy and wonder, so that you cannot help but share his light with those around you.

Prayer Reflections

1. Who are several people in your life that are still living in darkness?
2. What are some ways that you can share the love and truth of Christ with these friends?
3. Pray that God would shine his light through you and that he would penetrate your lost friends' hearts with gospel light.

Week 2

A Savior for All the World

DECEMBER 7, 2021

Devotional by Chris Bruno, *Global Partner*

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.

—Matthew 4:15–16

In the first four chapters of Matthew’s Gospel, we see the word “fulfill” six times. Matthew does not want us to miss that Jesus is the fulfillment to all of God’s promises to his people. One of the key themes throughout this Gospel is that the entire Old Testament story finds its climax and fulfillment in him.

During Advent and Christmas, we tend to think of the fulfillment of the OT through texts like Isaiah 7:14 (“the virgin shall conceive and bear a son”) or Micah 5:2 (“and you, O Bethlehem ... from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”). But as he introduces Jesus’ life and ministry, Matthew 4:15–16 quotes Isaiah 9:1–2 to remind us how Jesus brings light to a dark world.

In Isaiah 9, the Lord is speaking of the days when he will keep his promises to his people. The light of his glory will shine in Israel, but it won’t stop there. When the promised Savior comes, the people who walked in darkness will see a great light. Beyond Jerusalem, beyond Judea, all the way to the northern part of the land where the Gentiles live, this light will shine.

From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus had an eye beyond the borders of Israel. As we trace the rest of Matthew’s Gospel, we see this theme hinted at often, with the book ending with Jesus

commissioning his followers to shine this light to the ends of the earth. Make no mistake—from the very beginning of Matthew, the good news of God’s saving promises is a message for the whole world.

This Advent season, let’s be praying for those around us who continue to walk in darkness—both near and far. And when Christmas comes, let’s rejoice that the Savior of the whole world has come!

Prayer Requests

1. Pray that the Lord would cause us to delight more and more in Jesus, the Savior of all of us who have walked in darkness.
2. Pray that the Lord would open our eyes and give us opportunities to proclaim the good news of his birth (and life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reign) to everyone around us who needs to hear it.
3. Pray for Bethlehem global partners around the world who are spending Christmas far from family and friends. Pray that the Lord would encourage them and give them opportunities to celebrate this good news with many.

Week 2

You Are the Light of the World

DECEMBER 8, 2021

Devotional by Joe B., *Global Partner*

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

—Matthew 5:14–16

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”—Acts 13:47

Both of these texts say something that is quite shocking, especially as we consider them during the Advent season. The passages say that we—both individually as believers and corporately together—are the “light of the world.” Really? Our own failures and shortcomings, not to mention those of other Christians, are all too painfully obvious that it makes such a statement seem preposterous.

Rightfully in this season, we worship Jesus (and not his followers) as the light dawning in the darkness and shining upon the nations (Matthew 4:15–16). The Apostle Paul, who while understanding his gospel ministry as a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6), ultimately traveled thousands of miles preaching not himself but Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Corinthians 4:5). Jesus is the only one worthy of our worship and obedience this Advent season. Only he can save us from the darkness of our own hearts and lives, and only he can deliver the nations from their own darkness.

And yet, as true as all of that is, we must go back to the Scriptures before us today and take to heart the truth that we ourselves are, through Jesus Christ, the “light of the world.” Jesus shines into our darkness and makes us light, so that in both our words and deeds we might be lights in the midst of darkness, not only in the south metro area, but to the ends of the earth.

Prayer Reflections

1. Where has Jesus placed you this Advent season to be a light in the midst of darkness? Are you taking seriously through prayer, deed, and word this calling from the Lord?
2. What are those areas of darkness in your heart, family, relationships, and communities where you long for light to break in? In what ways are you working with the Lord to push back this darkness?
3. What are the nations and peoples you can pray for Jesus’ light to break in this Advent season?

Week 2

Chosen and Called Into the Light

DECEMBER 9, 2021

Devotional by Pastor Dave Zuleger

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.— 1 Peter 2:9

What an amazing thing it is to reflect on our salvation during Advent as we join in longing for the return of our Savior! We were in darkness in so many ways, according to Ephesians 2:12:

- Separated from Christ
- Strangers to the covenants of promise
- Without hope and without God in the world

All of that adds up to a dark, hopeless existence with no ability to save ourselves or even recognize the darkness we were in.

But God chose us and called us out of the darkness. He brought us into his marvelous light. And he didn't just save us individually but he brought us together as a people for his own possession. He made us into a holy nation. Because of him, we are a chosen race. No longer on the outside in darkness looking in. No longer without hope.

In a season where many people around you will be wearing themselves out searching for hope in all the wrong places and clinging to nostalgia to carry them through this season, don't join in. You have a sure hope.

Instead, proclaim the excellencies of the God who called you from darkness and into his light. Proclaim his sure, steady, saving hope. Perhaps this Christmas, Jesus would see fit to call them to himself.

Prayer Reflections

1. When was the last time you reflected on the glory of your salvation? Spend some time doing that now.
2. Where do you find yourself grasping for hope this Advent season? Ask Jesus to remind you of your sure hope in him.
3. Who do you know that needs this lasting hope and doesn't yet know Jesus? Take a minute to pray for them.

Week 2

Sooner or Later ... But Inevitably!

DECEMBER 10, 2021

Devotional by Pastor David Livingston

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.—Habakkuk 2:14

Among God's promises of what's coming this one is stupendous! The complaining and doubtful prophet needed to hear this sentence—perhaps even more desperately than we do now ... if that's possible. Why? Because in his dialogue with God most of what the sovereign Lord told Habakkuk amounted to Israel deservedly taking a deep dive into near annihilation, with a nation less righteous than Israel being God's instrument of discipline and judgment!

And the Lord's answer: "Write the vision ... for still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" (2:2–3).

The vision of God's glory filling the earth has unmistakably begun with Jesus' first coming: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14). And it is being fulfilled personally in those that are being saved, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus' (2 Corinthians 4:6). And further still, our calling to fill the earth with his glory is clear: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Prayer Reflections

1. What worries do you presently struggle with and complain about in these present dark times?
2. What circumstances do you require in order to be happy?
3. What are you doing (or will you do) to fill the earth with the glory of God to at least one other person in 2022?

Week 3

The Darkness Has Not Overcome the Light

DECEMBER 13, 2021

Devotional by Pastor Dave Zuleger

In him [Jesus!] was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

—John 1:4-5

Jesus has life to offer the world. And that life he offers is the light of men. In other words, if you come into the life of Jesus you will have your eyes open to truly see. That is what light does. It causes the darkness to flee and helps us to see.

The darkness has not overcome the light. That is, the devil, sin, suffering, and all the brokenness flowing from Genesis 3 have not had the final say. King Jesus has brought life into the world through his perfect life, substitutionary death, and resurrection to conquer death, and therefore dealt darkness its deadly blow. It will not survive.

So, take heart! Though it may feel like death and darkness all around you and sometimes even within you—that is not the final word. Instead for those in Christ, there is life and light that will last for all of eternity. To those who receive life in Christ he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:9–13).

You are a child of the light. You are “sons and daughters of light.” You have eternal life. Jesus, the Light of the World, came that you might have life abundant in him—not based on circumstances but based on his finished work. So look to Jesus, the Light of the World, and ask him to remind you of all that you have in him, and

to show you afresh how he might want you to walk in the hope and health of his light this Advent season.

Prayer Reflections

1. Read John 1, how are life and light related? Where are both found?
2. What are the places of darkness in your own soul right now? How do the promises of Jesus shine light into those spaces?
3. How does the gospel bring hope and health to our places of despondency and despair or to those around us struggling with those things?

Week 3

Jesus Is the Radiance and Glory of God

DECEMBER 14, 2021

Devotional by Pastor Nick Roen

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.—Hebrews 1:1–3

It's easy to overlook the logic at work in this text. God has spoken to us in these last days through his Son, Jesus Christ. Now, think about the meaning wrapped up in the word "son." It speaks so powerfully about who Jesus actually is. What is the son of a duck? A duck. What is the son of a human? A human.

What is the son of God? God!

In Hebrews 1:3, we read that Jesus is "the exact imprint of [God's] nature." Which is exactly what you would expect for the Son of God; surely he would have the exact nature of God himself. Jesus shares the divine nature with the Father. Jesus is God.

So who is it that created the world and upholds the universe by his power? God.

And who is it that created the world and upholds the universe by his power? Jesus.

We don't worship any old baby that was born in a manger 2000 years ago. We worship a baby that brought with him the "radiance and glory of God" himself. And through him, verse 2 says, God is speaking to us. Through the person and work of Christ, God is

speaking his sovereign, saving, redeeming, keeping grace and love to a world that desperately needs it. So join God and speak the name of Jesus yourself! Share him with those you love, and spread the radiance and glory of God near and far.

Prayer Reflections

1. Who in your life have you been hesitant to share the love of God's Son with? Write down three names.
2. Pray for those people over the next couple weeks, and look for ways to speak his divine love and grace into their lives.

Week 3

Dark-Expelling, Perfect Light

DECEMBER 15, 2021

Devotional by Steve Rinde, *Coordinator for Facilities*

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 cleanses us from all sin.—1 John 1:5–8

As you read this, we are all in the middle of a season where emotions are likely heightened, bouncing from frenzied planning to peace-filled joy to unabating sadness to grateful love. Some brothers and sisters may linger longer in any given one of these areas. Wherever you are, take a moment to remember that Christ—the dark-expelling, perfect light—came into this world to claim and cleanse his own. This includes you.

He is still reigning and shining brilliant light just as much as he did when walking this earth. He is also fellowshiping continually with you individually and with us collectively as a blood-bought family.

But darkness is still around us. You know it, you feel it. Walking in darkness means not walking with Christ, our light. While sin in itself is darkness, if we are battling and hating sin—with Christ advocating to the Father while the Spirit is indwelling us—we are walking, (even if sometimes it feels like limping) in the light (1 John 2:1b).

Do not faint. There is sweet freedom in knowing our true selves as exposed by God, which is our union with Christ! This Advent

season, remember that you are in the light and can be light to those around you because—and *only because*—you are in Christ, the light.

Prayer Reflections

1. What is one dark area you need Jesus to cleanse by his blood right now? Take it to him.
2. What is one thing you can do today to walk in and feel his light? Ask him.
3. What rich benefits could you reap by meditating on your union with Christ throughout this day, especially when you feel inadequate or see sin your life? Try it.

Week 3

Forgiven and Free

DECEMBER 16, 2021

Devotional by Matt Moore, *Ministry Intern*

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.—Colossians 1:13–14

Almost every story about a rescue mission goes something like this: An evildoer takes an innocent person captive against his or her will, and then a valiant hero sets out to rescue said victim from their captivity. However, the story of Jesus’s rescue mission does not fit this script. He is the Valiant Hero, and those he seeks to save are in real need of rescue. But Jesus did not come to deliver *innocent* people from *unchosen* captivity. He came to deliver *guilty* people from *chosen* captivity.

You and I were not “out of place” in the domain of darkness. We willingly lived there and gladly participated in its sinful economy. This is why Paul so closely links our “redemption” with “the forgiveness of sins.” For us to be liberated from our slavery to sin and our trajectory toward eternal darkness, *we had to be forgiven*. And for us to be forgiven, justice had to be paid. And for justice to be paid, someone had to die. As the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant taught us: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

And so our Valiant Hero came—to shed *his* blood. The Son of God was born so that he could die and by his death secure our forgiveness, liberate us from bondage, and qualify us “to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12). Through faith in his liberating work (and even our faith is his work!), we have been freed from the suffocating darkness we had chosen for ourselves and now breathe the grace-filled air of the Kingdom

of Light. There is no more condemnation upon us and no eternal darkness waiting for us. There is only grace. Only light.

Prayer Reflections

1. Are you moved by what Jesus has done for you? If you aren't, don't despair. Ask God to help your heart see his glory and goodness and to respond to what you see.
2. Who can you invite into the Kingdom of Light before year's end?

Week 3

Good Tidings of Great Joy

DECEMBER 17, 2021

Devotional by Holly Nelson, *Minister for Women's Ministry*

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.—John 12:46

This is the meaning of Christmas. This is “good tidings of great joy,” because without *the* light, we *will* remain in darkness. The interesting thing is that we don’t know what we don’t know. I didn’t even know I was in the dark until Jesus Christ shined his light into my heart and mind to reveal my sad state of spiritual darkness and my need for light.

For example, when it’s cloudy outside, I look across the room in my house and the air seems clear, but when the light from the sun shines bright through the window, I then see floating dust in the air that I had no idea was there.

That is like our sin and state of darkness. We don’t even know how spiritually blind we are until Light shines in. Jesus is the only light, and therefore our only hope of being set free from darkness is to believe in him and receive his light.

Go shout it on the mountain that Jesus Christ (Light) is born!

Prayer Reflections

1. Are you moved by what Jesus has done for you? If you are willing to humbly ask the Lord to reveal “what it is that you don’t know that you don’t know”?
2. And will you receive his light in your life or in some area of your life where darkness is hiding?
3. Who do you know that remains in a sad state of darkness and doesn’t even know it? Will you share with them this “Good Tidings of Great Joy”—that Jesus came into the world as light, so that whoever believes in him may not remain in darkness?

Week 4

Eternity in the Light of His Presence

DECEMBER 20, 2021

Devotional by Pastor Dave Zuleger

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.—Revelation 22:3–5

This passage requires some imagination. None of us have ever experienced a reality where there is “nothing accursed” and no darkness around us. Can you imagine a place with none of the damaging elements of sin at work or soon to be at work? Can you imagine a place free of sin in relationships? Can you imagine your heart free of temptation? It’s hard to imagine.

We’ve lived all of our lives in the broken place of a Genesis 3 world. Sin and suffering mark every human being made in the image of God to various degrees of breadth and depth. Now, at best, we see the glories of Christ through a glass dimly. And it is easy to feel our identity wrapped up in the sins we’ve committed, the sins we’ve had committed against us, and all the suffering that has occurred.

But that’s not our identity. We belong to King Jesus. His blood has forgiven our guilt and his righteousness has covered our shame. His name is on our foreheads. We are marked by him as our truest identity. And for those who belong to King Jesus, there is a day coming soon when we will not see dimly but fully. There is a day coming when all the sin and suffering falls away and we are in his presence where his light shines and there is fullness of joy and

pleasures forevermore. The darkness will be gone and there will only be light—the light of our King as we reign with him forever.

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”—1 Corinthians 2:9

Prayer Reflections

1. How might this future light of hope invade your present darkness?
2. Pray for grace to have a sanctified imagination that can move towards this future reality with deep hope and joy.
3. Reflect on the reality that this sure, future hope has already been paid for in full by the blood of Jesus.

Week 4

The Light of the World Is With Us

DECEMBER 21, 2021

Devotional by Stacy Thorpe, Ministerial Coordinator for Care & Counseling

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.—Psalm 139:7–12

Are you aware of God's presence with you right now? Stop and think about that for a minute. The all-powerful God who created the world and is high above all things, also wants you to know that he is always with you. Although we can know this in our head, our subjective experience of this can come and go.

In this beloved psalm, David celebrates the intimate ways that God knows him. In this stanza, David says to the Lord that there is nowhere he can go that the Lord is not there. He is rejoicing in the light of God's presence.

Wherever you find yourself today, there God is with you. In your joy and flourishing, he is there as the Giver of all good gifts. In the darkest places or the darkest moments, even there, God is. No darkness is too dark for him. At Christmas, we celebrate the Light of the World breaking into our darkness and Immanuel—God with us. And while we wait for his return again, to put an end to darkness forever, we have his very Spirit living inside us to comfort us and empower us to shine his light wherever we go.

Prayer Reflections

1. Personalize this psalm for your situation and speak it to the Lord.
2. How can you live more aware of God's presence with you today?

Week 4

In the Darkness, I Will Wait for You

DECEMBER 22, 2021

Devotional by Rachel Dyvig, Lead Administrative Assistant

But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.—Micah 7:8

We are days away from Christmas, and perhaps, this year, Christmas is hard for you with damaged relationships among your family or friends. If this is the case, Christmas could just be another reminder that the joy and lights of this season are not so in your heart or life, whether from being sinned against or sinning against another.

Or maybe you are in a dark season of the soul and Christmas will just be another day when everything still feels cold and silent in your mind and heart.

What then?

Micah 7 has encouragements for both of these things:

Look to Jesus and wait for him. You are seen and heard by this Savior. Pour out your heart before him (Psalm 62:8). If you have been harmed by others, he is the one who will heal your broken heart and bind up your wounds (Psalm 147:3). Talk to him. And if you have wounded a friend or family member, your Savior is eager to forgive you (1 John 1:9). Talk to him.

He is here for you, no matter what the darkness of your heart or hardness of your circumstances may tell you. He is not afraid to crouch in the dark with you. Nor are you alone in the dark—

Immanuel is with you. He will be a light to you. And he will not blow out your faintly burning wick (Isaiah 42:3).

Prayer Reflections

1. Is there a relationship that God is calling you to seek to make right?
2. If life feels especially hard and dark for you, who might God be nudging you to reach out to and be honest with them about how you are doing?
3. Read Lamentations 3:21–26 and then spend some time thanking Jesus for who he is (good, merciful, compassionate, loving, faithful, your portion).

Week 4

The Lamb Is the Light

DECEMBER 23, 2021

Devotional by Nathan Metcalf, *Pastoral Resident for Youth*

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.—Revelation 21:23–24

God—the voice calling out into nothingness to create light, the babe who was born under a star-lit night, the Son who died as the sky went dark and three days later was raised to life as the sun was rising—shines in all his glory, someday to even overthrow the need of the sun with which shadows and hidden places can still be found. The glory of God and the lamp which is the Lamb will be our eternal light without any shadows.

On that day we are told that by this light “will the nations walk.” What we do will forever be in his perfect light of holy glory. Do we read this and find hope and longing for this day? Or do we read this and find dread?

What about today—pre-eternity? Do we want all things done here and now to be found in his light and presence? John, the author of Revelation, also wrote 1 John 2:28, “abide in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”

My prayer for all of us is that at the thought of the eternal future awaiting us, we would be people who live with anticipation of the coming eternal kingdom where the Lamb will shine into all the dark places, that we may abide so fully in him that we do not live in dread, shrinking back from the thought of this moment, but sing with joyous anticipation. That we would have an ever-increasing

joy filling us with hope for that day when we will see all sin, shadows, and darkness banished by the Lamb.

Prayer Reflections

1. What do you feel when you think about the day when Jesus will shine his glory into all the dark places?
2. What are some ways you can ask the Holy Spirit to be at work in your life right now to help you keep abiding in him?
3. Who are the people in your life that you think might dread the day of the Lord? Take time to pray for them today and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh desire for sharing with them the hope that we can have as followers of the Lamb.

Week 4

A Giving God

DECEMBER 24, 2021

Devotional by Pastor Nick Roen

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.—James 1:17

God is the giver of such good gifts. One of my favorite passages is Matthew 6:26–30, where Jesus tells his followers to consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Does he not feed every sparrow, and clothe every lily with beauty and splendor? How much MORE, Jesus asks, will God care for you and clothe you with everything you need.

Indeed, God does so much more than provide for our physical needs. In Christ, God has given us the greatest gift in the entire universe. So in that sense, there is nothing more that God could give us that would be better than Jesus. When we sing, “Hallelujah, all I have is Christ,” we really mean that only having Jesus is more than having everything else.

And that is really good news in a world that is so unstable. In a moment, our lives can be upended and everything we thought we knew can change. But God doesn’t change. He remains the same, and his promises never fail. In Christ, God will never fail to give you exactly what you need to get to glory.

Think about it like this: When Christ came, the Father of Lights was giving us the gift of a life where *nothing* is up for grabs. At least, not ultimately up for grabs. If you lose everything and have Jesus, then you have everything. And Jesus isn’t going anywhere.

Prayer Reflections

1. Are there any areas of your life where you are tempted to think, “If I lose this, my life is over.” Where are you tempted to trust other things for ultimate satisfaction?
2. Are there areas of life where you have a hard time seeing God’s provision?
3. Like Jesus, who taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” pray that God would meet all of your needs. And pray that he would help you to treasure the greatest gift, Jesus, more than anything else.

Week 4

Peace, Salvation, Light

CHRISTMAS DAY 2021

Devotional by Pastor Dave Zuleger

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”—Luke 2:29–32

Can you imagine being Simeon and being told by God that you would not die until you laid your eyes on the coming Messiah—the One who would fulfill all the promises of God for forgiveness, restoration, and hope? Imagine the anticipation. That’s what Advent is all about. It’s the season of anticipating the second coming of Jesus, much like those who anticipated his first coming.

When Simeon sees Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit, what does he say? Well, first he says he has peace. His heart is full and he is at rest in his soul. God has kept his promise. He has sent the Savior. All will be made new.

Why? Because salvation has come. This baby Jesus we celebrate on Christmas Day would grow up to be the sacrifice for sins. He would live a life holy before God, die a substitutionary death for sinners, and rise again to conquer death. And for all who believe in his name, there would be eternal life—salvation from sins.

This reality would be light to the ends of the earth for the nations and glory for Israel. In other words, this salvation is offered to any who would trust in this Savior. He is good news of great joy for all people (Luke 2:10). This Jewish Messiah was coming to bring global salvation to the nations for any with eyes to see.

Have you seen him? Is he your Light? Is he your salvation? Let your heart be filled with peace this Christmas Day. He has come according to the word of God and he will come again very soon to make all things new.

Prayer Reflections

1. Have you laid your eyes on Jesus? Have you seen his salvation?
2. Rejoice in your salvation in Jesus, or make today the day you trust him for the first time.
3. Pray for those in your life who do not yet know this peace, salvation, and light.



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