



Spread the Light

HPUMC 2018
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Spread the Light

THIS ADVENT

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning “coming.” Every year we celebrate Advent as we prepare for the coming of Christ. There are many traditions throughout the Advent season that help us prepare for Christ’s birth, one of which is the lighting of the Advent wreath.

Perhaps you’ve seen it. Every Sunday in Advent, before the start of a service, someone will light one of the Advent candles. But do you know what they represent or why they’re different colors?

The Advent wreath is a Christian tradition that was derived from a secular practice. During the dark days of December, people used to light candles on wreaths as a sign of hope for the light to come with spring. Somewhere during the Middle Ages, the wreath was adapted by Christians to spiritually prepare for Christmas with Christ as the light of the world.

Each week in Advent we light a different candle - one for hope, one for peace, one for joy, and one for love - and on Christmas day, we light the Christ candle. The gradually increasing light symbolizes the approach of the birth of Christ, who is, indeed, the light of the world.

This year we invite you to participate in this meaningful tradition. Each week we’ll explore the different candle themes and what it means to spread the light of hope, peace, joy, love, and ultimately, the light of Christ. Consider using your own Advent wreath at home as you read these daily devotionals.

This Christmas, may you spread the light.

With joyful hope,

The HPUMC Adult Ministry Team

ICONS



Candle
Lighting



A Scripture
Reading



A Reflection



Questions for
Discussion



A Short
Prayer

THE
Light of Hope



The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Sunday, December 2



Today we begin to prepare for the birth of Jesus at Christmas. This week we light the first Advent candle, the light of hope. In some traditions, it's known as the prophecy candle for it symbolizes expectation. This candle is one of three purple candles. In the Christian tradition, purple symbolizes repentance, as well as the royalty and sovereignty of Christ. Purple is the traditional color of the Advent season demonstrating the anticipation and reception of the coming King.

The candle of hope is the first candle we light, because it's hope that first illuminates the darkness. It's what allows us to have peace, joy, and love. The anticipation of Christ brings hope to a dark world. Read the words of the prophet Isaiah, and grab hold of the hope. Whether you are oppressed or brokenhearted, a captive or a prisoner, a person who mourns or whose spirit is faint, there is hope for you.

This week, as you light the candle of hope, we invite you to share in the litany below - with family, friends, a small group, or in individual prayer. After you do, read aloud the daily Scripture readings, ponder the reflections on hope, discuss the daily questions, and close in prayer.



The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light of hope has shone.

May we rejoice and hold the light of hope for one another.

Thanks be to God for the hope of Jesus Christ.



What does hope mean to you?



God of all creation and Lord of light, bless our wreath and candles. Be present among us as we come to celebrate, in Scripture, prayer, and devotion, the coming of Christ. May our hearts and minds reflect the light of hope this week. Amen.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Monday, December 3



We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9



Hope is defined as a feeling of trust or expectation. As people of faith we define hope differently than one might define optimism. Optimism is, simply put, positive thinking. Optimism can thus be naive. Hope, however, is not naive. Hope sees the heartbreak, the failure, the loneliness, and the pain, and says “yes, **but**...” Hope, in that way, is defiant.

In life we are afflicted in almost every way; we are perplexed, persecuted, and often struck down. **But**, by hope, we are not crushed; we are not driven to despair; we are never forsaken, nor are we destroyed.

Yes, life is hard. Christian hope doesn't ask us to turn a blind eye to life's pain. It only asks that we say, “yes, **but**...”



How are optimism and hope different to you?



God of hope, help us to be a people that when things are hard we know that we are not forgotten or destroyed. Help us to live into the hope you offer and offer that hope to others. Amen.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Day Three
Tuesday, December 4



*But those who wait for the LORD
shall renew their strength.
They shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.*

ISAIAH 40:31



Emily Dickinson wrote that “hope is the thing with feathers, that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all.”

In addition to being defiant, hope is also persistent. Even when darkness closes in, hope continues to sing its song. Like a bird that cannot be silenced, hope does not grow weary or faint. Hope persists despite all odds.

Emily Dickinson continued, “I’ve heard [hope] in the chilliest land, and on the strangest sea, yet never in extremity, it asked a crumb of me.” Hope can be found everywhere. In the farthest stretch of land and sea, hope is there, eager only to be seized.



How can hope renew your strength this Advent season?



*God of hope, would you show us that there is no place where hope is not welcomed,
and no place where hope is silenced. Help us to be a people of hope when it seems
unthinkable. Amen.*

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Day Four

Wednesday, December 5



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.

JEREMIAH 29:11



Hope is a common word, embroidered on pillows and framed above doorways. The idea of hope is nice, but sometimes it can seem so far away. So what do we do when all seems hopeless?

When the people of Israel were in exile, God told them that God had a plan for them - a future for them full of hope. The irony was that God had just proclaimed (one verse earlier) that they wouldn't be delivered from their exile for another 70 years - meaning not in their lifetime!

It turns out, hope isn't the escape of suffering; hope is the perseverance that gets us through. In the midst of your suffering, cling to Jeremiah 29:11, but cling to it for the right reason: not in the false hope that God will take away your suffering, but in the true, gospel confidence that God will give you hope in the midst of it.



When has God helped you through a painful situation?
How did clinging to hope alter your perspective?



God of hope, when our lives have us in seasons of waiting, suffering, or longing, remind us that in You hope is available and will carry us through. Amen.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Day Five
Thursday, December 6



*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

MATTHEW 11:28-30



“O Little Town of Bethlehem” is a popular Christmas hymn written in the 19th century by a man named Phillips Brooks. Brooks wrote the hymn after riding horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. The song is a familiar one, but the third stanza was never included in its publication. As you read it, consider carefully its hopeful words.

*O Little Town of Bethlehem...
Where children pure and happy
Pray to the blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to thee,
Son of the undefiled;
Where charity stands watching
And faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks,
And Christmas comes once more.*



Where do you see hope today? Where is the glory breaking?



*God of hope, as we see the needs of a hurting world we know that your love is the
changing agent. Let us be faithful people as we carry your love into the places that
wait in hope. Amen.*

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Advent Six
Friday, December 7



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1 PETER 1:3



One of the sacraments that we practice in the United Methodist Church is baptism. We believe that through baptism we are born anew by the free gift of God's grace and placed within a new family called church.

As with most families, we inherit a narrative, in this case God's mighty acts narrated in scripture. The narrative we inherit is not only one of the past, but one into which we are now invited and the Spirit empowers us to embody in our own lives, here and now.

Through baptism, we become part of the unfolding narrative of God's grace and hope. This Advent, we remember our baptisms. We remember the great mercy given to us that birthed us into a living hope.



In what ways can our church family bring God's hope to the world?



God of hope, help us to live into the celebrated glory of new life in you! Amen.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Saturday, December 8



To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

COLOSSIANS 1:27

The hope of glory mentioned in the first chapter of Colossians is the fulfillment of God's promise to restore us and all creation. This hope is not a wishful thought, but the confident, expectant, joyful knowledge that we are being changed by God and will one day see Christ face to face, having been conformed to Christ's image.

In the Christmas carol, "O Holy Night," Adolphe Adam wrote the following words:

A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.

For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morning.

Recognizing that Christ is in you, spend some time considering how you can be a thrill of hope to a weary world in need. May you break forth a new and glorious morning for someone else as you work together with Christ to restore humanity and all creation to wholeness.



How can you spread the light of hope?



God of hope, through Jesus Christ you have given us the riches of glory. Enable us, as bearers of Christ, to spread this hope to the world. Amen.

THE *Light of Peace*



“I have said these things to you in figures of speech.
The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures,
but will tell you plainly of the Father.

On that day you will ask in my name.

I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf;
for the Father himself loves you,

because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

I came from the Father and have come into the world;
again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.”

His disciples said, “Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech!
Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you;
by this we believe that you came from God.”

Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? The hour is coming, indeed it has come,
when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone.

Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.

In the world you face persecution.

But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF PEACE

Week Two

Sunday, December 9



As we move into the second week of Advent, we continue to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ. This week, we light the candle of peace, the second of the three purple candles. Some traditions call this candle the Bethlehem Candle and associate it with the faith of Mary and Joseph as they journeyed to Bethlehem at the beginning of Luke chapter two. In the United Methodist Church, however, we associate the second purple candle with the peace that we carry in our hearts as we patiently wait for the birth of Christ.

The peace we feel during this period of holy waiting is not a simple, contented peace. It is powerful and prophetic. It is a peace that knows there is much left to do in the world and is preparing us to do it. The peace of Christ says to us, "there will be darkness, there will be pain, but take heart, for I have overcome the world." This peace peers into the darkness, ready to spread the light.

As you light the candle of peace each day this week, you are invited to participate in the following litany either with your family, friends, or just on your own. Afterwards, read aloud the daily scripture reading and consider the reflections on peace, discuss the questions for each day, and close with a prayer. Make this space in your day holy as we continue to wait for the Lord.



Because of war and pain, because of division and hatred,

We light this candle of peace.

May the light from this candle overwhelm the world, pressing us toward Christ.

May the peace of Christ fill us to overflowing.



What does peace mean to you?



God of all creation and Lord of light, as we spend this week thinking and learning about peace, let us come to a fuller and deeper understanding of what your peace means for our lives. Amen.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF PEACE

Monday, December 10



*The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.*

NUMBERS 6:24-26



Peace comes in many forms. Sometimes it is a short-lived feeling; sometimes it is more lasting. In the time of Christ, the Roman empire was so powerful that it established what was called the *pax Romana* or the peace of Rome. The *pax Romana* was a long period of relative peace and stability during the Roman empire. However, the reason for the “peace” was due to oppressive force which kept the subjects of Rome out of war, but also beat them down and ensured they bowed to the emperor.

The peace of Christ, which we celebrate this week, is different than that. It is life-giving and long-lasting. It doesn’t fade or wane, and it is not built on putting people down. Lean into this peace today, focus on it, and let it fill every fiber of your being, preparing you for the coming of Christ.



How does Christ’s peace differ from the peace the world offers?



*God of peace, as we reflect on your peace today, would you open our hearts
and give us the willingness to receive the gift of peace you are offering us. Amen.*

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF PEACE

Prayer Time
Tuesday, December 11



*Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.*

PSALM 119:165



There is a popular Christmas carol sung every year called "I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day." Perhaps you have heard of it. It comes from a poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on Christmas of 1863 after his son returned deeply wounded from fighting with the Union in the Civil War. Here is Longfellow's poem. As you read it, think about what the peace of Christ means to you. Reflect on how these words speak into the idea of Advent as a period of darkness while we wait on the Lord to come.

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet, the words repeat
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men!
And thought how, as the day had come,
the belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men!*

*Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men!*

*Then from each black, accursed mouth,
the cannon thundered in the South,*

*And with the sound the carols drowned
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men!
It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn the households born
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men!"
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, goodwill to men!"*



How can peace renew your strength this Advent season?



God of peace, when we fear that hatred is stronger than the love and peace from you, help us to truly believe that Your peace can exist on earth and that we can graciously help spread it. Amen.

Day Eleven

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF PEACE

Wednesday, December 12



*For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*

ISAIAH 54:10



*Lord make me an instrument of your 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.*

*O divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be
understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it's in dying that we are born to eternal
life. Amen.*

As you read the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi above, consider the power of God's covenantal peace. That, even as mountains depart, hills fall away, and indeed the world falls in on itself, God's steadfast love and peace will remain. Read the prayer again, slower this time, and notice that everything flows first from God's peace. Consider what it would mean for you to become an instrument of that powerful peace this Advent season.



Where in your life can you choose the path of peace rather than the path of division or chaos?



*God of peace, give us the faith to believe that your peace will not depart from us.
Amen.*

Day Twelve

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF PEACE

Thursday, December 13



Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

JOHN 14:27



There is a story floating around which tells of a king who announced a competition. The king sent out a decree: "To all artists in the land, bring me your best depictions of peace. Whoever can depict peace the best will be granted a place among my court as our chief painter!"

Many artists sent in their finest works. One painting in particular caught the eye of most visitors. It showed a glassy lake perfectly mirroring snow-capped mountains under a wide, blue sky. Many thought to themselves that this would surely be the painting chosen by the king.

When the curtain covering the winning painting was dropped, everyone was shocked. The winner also depicted a mountain, but this one was bare and surrounded by a stormy sky filled with lightning. Many wondered if the king had lost his mind to think this painting depicted peace! However, as onlookers gazed at the piece, they slowly noticed a small bush tucked into a crack on the side of the mountain. Inside the bush was a mother bird on her nest, sitting quietly, at peace.



How can we tap into sustaining peace next time a storm rolls in?



God of peace, as we face each day, may we be surprised by the kind of peace you provide and the spaces in our lives where your peace is present and constant. Amen.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF PEACE

Our Thirteenth

Friday, December 14



Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7



"Peace means far more than the opposite of war." - Fred Rogers

Peace is not just something that arrives once conflict has vanished, nor is it a state of being. Peace is an ongoing, active thing. One must choose peace each and every day. The choice for peace is not just for yourself either. Peace is something we choose for those we're in relationship with as well.

What Paul tells the Philippians in the Scripture reading for today is not to sit idly by and wait for the peace of God to miraculously show up. Rather, we are instructed to pray and open ourselves to God, asking God to make us instruments of peace. If we want to encounter the peace of Christ, if we want to spread that peace to the rest of the world, we have to relentlessly pursue it in all that we do and in each and every moment.



In what area in your life can you actively choose peace?



God of peace, give us the courage to choose peace for ourselves. When conflict arises, when injustice persists, may we be agents of peace. Amen.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF PEACE

Saturday, December 15



But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

COLOSSIANS 1:27



This week we have explored the active nature of peace. We have looked at peace not as a passive, quiet mindset, but an active, forward-facing way of approaching the world. James speaks to this mindset in today's scripture verses, reminding us that wisdom from above is peaceable and that those who sow peace, will reap righteousness.

Consider the ways you can spread and sow peace in the world around you today. Perhaps it simply starts with not responding in anger to the driver who cuts you off on the highway. Maybe it's getting to know the kid in school who everyone thinks is different. Reaching out to those who don't look like us or act like us is an active way we model for others what it means to live in a peaceable community.



How can you spread the light of peace?



*God of peace, help us learn how to model peace for the world.
Give us the opportunity to offer peace and the courage to do it. Amen.*

THE
Light of Joy



In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.
Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,
and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid;
for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...”
When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,
“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place,
which the Lord has made known to us.”
So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.
When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;
and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.
But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.
The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God
for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Week Three

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF JOY

Sunday, December 16



On the third Sunday of Advent, called Gaudete Sunday, we light the rose colored candle. “Gaudete” means rejoice, and we do so because we are now more than halfway through our Advent journey. Though we have not yet arrived at Christmas morning, we rejoice because we’re getting closer.

In Luke chapter two, the angel of the Lord appeared to a group of shepherds in the dark of the night. Often, we’re afraid of the dark, because we’re afraid of the unknown, of what we can’t see. Yet, it’s from within the darkness of the night that the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds. God shines light in dark places, transforming fear into unexpected, sometimes incomprehensible joy.

This week we light our third candle with hopeful hearts and peaceful minds, and we join the shepherds in rejoicing at the “good news of great joy for all the people.” We rejoice as our anticipation grows, our preparation intensifies, and we draw closer to the coming of Jesus Christ.

As you light the candle of joy this week, consider using the litany below either with friends, family, or by yourself. Then allow the daily Scripture, reflections, and prayers to open you to the joy of the good news of Jesus Christ.



Darkness cannot drive out darkness;

Only light can do that.

May we rejoice and hold the light of joy for one another,

For Christ is good news for all people.



What does joy mean to you?



God of all creation and Lord of light, we rejoice that you can turn our darkest hours into joy. Open our eyes to see your glory and inspire us to be agents of your joy in our homes, our communities, and in this world. Amen.

Day Sixteen

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF JOY

Monday, December 17



*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-5



Always. Rejoice always. This seems like an unrealistic expectation Paul gives to the church in Philippi. Life is full of ups and downs. Can people really be expected to *rejoice* during moments and experiences of darkness, pain, suffering?

Many believe Paul wrote this letter while in prison. It's hard to imagine instructing others to rejoice always while imprisoned, but Paul does not just say rejoice always, he says, "*rejoice in the Lord always.*" Though circumstances will change, the Lord is consistent, and consistently near. It's this truth that inspires people like Archbishop Desmond Tutu to write the following:

"Discovering more joy does not save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily too. Perhaps we are just more alive. Yet as we discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that ennobles rather than embitters. We have hardship without becoming hard. We have heartbreaks without being broken."



When has joy made you feel more alive?



God of joy, enlighten our hearts to know the difference between being happy about our circumstances and rejoicing in the Lord. As we draw near to you this season, let us experience the joy that only you can provide. Amen.

Day Seventeen

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF JOY
Tuesday, December 18



*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.*

PSALM 98:4-6



It may be surprising to know the classic Christmas hymn, “Joy to the World,” was not inspired by the Christmas narrative in Luke 2, but rather by these words found in the 98th Psalm. Isaac Watts, the English poet and clergyman, paraphrased the Psalm writing:

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing*

Watts invites both singer and hearer alike to create space in their heart for the coming of Christ. Each individual is invited to open their heart, like the stable that fateful night, and prepare a gentle space like that of a manger. Joy is found in the gentle and open heart, and the result is the chorus of heaven and nature uniting in a song of celebration.



How can we prepare our hearts for the joy that is Christ?



God of Joy, help us to make room in our heart for you. Would you allow us to receive you fully as the King. Thank you for the joy you bring into the world. Amen.

Day Eighteen

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF JOY

Wednesday, December 19



Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

ECCLESIASTES 9:7,9



The book of Ecclesiastes is not traditionally referred to as a book of joy. As the author reflects on the experiences of his life, he realizes he is always met with sadness. Those who are without are found wanting and those who have, want to have more. What is the point of all the struggle in life when in the end the same fate befalls the rich and the poor, the wise and the fool, even the righteous and the wicked?

However, after deeper reflection, the author realizes that though there is much suffering in the world, joy is there too. We only need the eyes to see it, the ears to hear it, the hands to hold it, and ultimately, the perspective to be aware that joy is there. Joy is not dependent on our circumstances - that's happiness. Joy is something that is available to us in the most mundane moments of life and even the hard ones too. We just have to claim it.



What can be altered in your busy life to allow more opportunities to see, hear, and hold joy?



God of joy, give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hands willing to hold, and perspective to see the gift of joy and the beauty it brings into our lives. Allow our joy to be filled to overflowing. Amen.

Our Nineteen

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF JOY

Thursday, December 20



The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.

ISAIAH 40:31



The second century theologian, St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, is traditionally quoted as saying, "The glory of God is man fully alive." Not only does God rejoice over you and find joy in your being, but the very glory of God is found in you living fully alive. From the dawn of creation, it has pleased God to dwell among creation. The incarnation (God made flesh in Jesus), which we anticipate during this Advent season, emphatically declares that God rejoices over creation. God takes so much joy in creation that God decided to come and be among creation - living with us, eating with us, walking with us. The joy we find in the Lord, the Lord finds in us. We rejoice in the Lord, and the Lord rejoices in us.



How can the thought of God rejoicing in us and dwelling among us bring comfort and healing to you?



God of joy, what a gift it is to know that we are a joy to you! Thank you for allowing us to bring something to the table and be a part of the journey of joy in the world. Amen.

Day Twenty

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF JOY
Friday, December 21



*Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
Your decrees are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the end.*

PSALM 119:105, 111-12



The Psalmist writes that the word of God is what lights the way. In the midst of darkness and despair, fear and hopelessness, God illuminates just enough for us to take the next step. We may not be able to see the final destination, but through God's promises and faithfulness the path will be lit. And we can be confident we are taking steps in the right direction, if they lead us to joy.

When asked "What then is the mark? Who is a Methodist according to your own account?" John Wesley responded that a Methodist is one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul."

Life is hard, but God promises to light the way for us, and if we follow the illuminated steps, joy will journey with us.



Do the decisions you make, and the path you are on, lead you and others to joy?
Why or why not?



*God of joy, you light the way, and every joyful step we take is a step closer to you.
Thank you God for being a lamp to our path. May we rejoice! Amen.*

Day Twenty-One

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF JOY
Saturday, December 22



I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

JOHN 15:11-12



Keeping commandments may not seem like a joyful thing. Commandments tend to trigger thoughts of rules and lists of do's and don'ts, which often lead to frustration at failed attempts to abide by the rules. However, in John's gospel, Jesus invites us to move beyond our lists of right and wrong, beyond our do's and don'ts, and settle into one commandment, "love one another as I have loved you."

When we love one another we participate in the joy of Christ. Our joy is complete, or as Eugene Peterson says in his translation, "wholly mature." When we abide in Jesus' command to love, then we become whole.

Love and joy share an intimate bond, for the greatest joy in life is found in loving one another and the greatest love in life is filled with joy. It's no wonder we move from lighting the candle of joy, to lighting the candle of love.



How does love bring you joy?



God of joy, we are all desperate for happiness, for true joy. Teach us to pursue love with the confidence that in love, we will find joy. Amen.

THE
Light of Love



For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Those who believe in him are not condemned;
but those who do not believe are condemned already,
because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world,
and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light,
so that their deeds may not be exposed.

But those who do what is true come to the light,
so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF LOVE

Week Four

Sunday, December 23



Today we light the fourth Advent candle, the candle of love. This is the last purple candle, and the final one before the Christ candle. This candle reminds us just how much God loves us, so much so that he sent his only Son into the world, not to condemn it but to offer it eternal life. Often when we think of eternal life we think only of life after death. But eternal life is actually a life that is offered to us now. It's a life of freedom, abundance, wholeness, and love. This is the life that Christ came into the world to offer us, because God loves us so much.

As we approach the arrival of Christmas Day, we remember that the greatest gift was God giving us Jesus. Jesus who was and is the embodiment of perfect love. This week, as you light the candle of love, reflect on John 13:34-35: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

As you light the candle of love these remaining days before Christmas, consider using the litany below with either your family, friends, or on your own. Then allow the daily Scriptures, reflections, and prayers to stir your heart toward love. The time of waiting is almost over; Christmas is near.



In a world where hate seems to reign, we remember the truth:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

So that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Thanks be to God for the love of our Savior, Jesus Christ.



What does love mean to you?



God of love, teach us to love. Help us to remember your example of perfect love and follow Christ's lead to demonstrate it in our lives. Let us be people that see you and know you through the way we live and the way we love. Amen.

Christmas Eve

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF LOVE
Monday, December 24



And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13



In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul writes about a number of different Spiritual gifts that people can have - gifts like prophecy, preaching, speaking in tongues, teaching, wisdom, and so forth. Each gift is particular to each person. However, he says that there are some gifts that are given to all believers. These gifts are faith, hope, and love. Where other spiritual gifts like prophecy will cease, tongues will be silent, and knowledge will pass, these three will always remain: faith, hope, and love. And then he adds that the greatest of these is love.

We need faith. Faith to believe that there is more; faith to trust that God is with us and for us. We need hope. Hope to carry us through the darkness; hope to lift us from our despair. But, ultimately, in the end, if we don't have love, these gifts won't take us far. It is love that anchors our faith, our hope, our peace, and our joy.

Paul continues his writing and says that if we have faith to move mountains, but we have not love, we are nothing. Everything, all things, hinge on love.



How can you spread the light of love?



God of love, we only know what love is by first being loved by you. Let us be love in a world filled with hate. Let us be changed and let us be agents of change by loving like Christ loved us. Amen.

THE
Light of Christ



In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid;

for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Christmas Day

SPREAD THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Sunday, December 25



Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

JOHN 8:12



Over the past several weeks we have slowly been preparing for the coming of Christ. We've been in darkness, slowly illuminating more and more light. We've journeyed with expectant hearts. We've remembered the hope that Christmas offers. We've explored the peace that Christ brings. We've rejoiced that Jesus indeed is on the way. And we've basked in the great love of God, to promise us such a gift in Jesus.

Today marks the end of our Advent journey. Today we celebrate that God fulfilled God's promises. The darkness of the world has seen a great light. Christ has come to bring hope, peace, joy, and love to a world in desperate need. Wherever you find yourself walking today, take heart. You do not walk in darkness. Through Christ, you possess the light of life. Hallelujah!

As you celebrate the gift of this great light, remember that you, too, are a bearer of light. So let it shine; spread the light of Christ. Take hope, embrace peace, shout with joy, and spread the love: Christ has come. As you light the Christ candle today, consider using this litany:



Rejoice, Christ has come!
Hallelujah, Christ is here.
Give thanks, Christ is the light of the world!
Thank you, God, for the light of life.



How can you spread the light of Christ today and always?



Light of the World, what a blessing this journey has been. We are so grateful for the abundance of hope, peace, joy, and love that the coming of Christ has offered us. Lord let us celebrate today and bask in the light you have brought to the world! We praise you for all your good and perfect gifts. Help us to spread the light of Christ. Amen.

2018 CHRISTMAS
Service Schedule

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13

Advent Service

7:00 pm • Cox Chapel • Allyson Wermelskirchen

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19

Traditional Candlelight Travelers' Service

7:00 pm • Sanctuary • Paul Rasmussen

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20

Cornerstone Candlelight Travelers' Service

7:00 pm • Cornerstone • Paul Rasmussen

CHRISTMAS EVE

Family Nativity Service

*11:00 am • Cornerstone • Andrew Wermelskirchen

Traditional Candlelight Services

*11:00 am | *1:00 pm | *2:30 pm • Sanctuary • Paul Rasmussen

*4:00 pm | *5:30 pm • Sanctuary • Matt Tuggle

*8:00 pm | 9:30 pm | 11:00 pm • Sanctuary • John Fiedler

The Feast

1:00 pm • Room 120 • Ramsey Patton

Carols, Communion, & Candlelight Services

2:30 pm | 3:30 pm • Cox Chapel • Walt Marcum

4:30 pm | 5:30 pm • Cox Chapel • Susan Robb

Cornerstone Candlelight Services

*3:00 pm • Wesley Hall • Matt Tuggle

*5:00 pm • Wesley Hall • Paul Rasmussen

*SERVICES WILL BE STREAMED AT HPUMCONLINE.ORG



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