



LIGHT *OF THE* WORLD

2022 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



**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





One of my favorite things to do each year during the holidays is to drive around after the sun has set searching for Christmas lights. There's just something about the twinkling lights in an otherwise sea of darkness that evokes a sense of wonder in me. I feel like a child all over again! I would go as far as to say that it doesn't truly feel like Christmas until I've seen the lights.

Whether we realize it or not, light has become a key part of how we celebrate the Christmas season. We string lights around our Christmas trees and cover our homes in them. Each Sunday during Advent we light a candle in the midst of a wreath. On Christmas Eve we raise a lit candle as we sing about a silent night. And we tell the story of a baby that was born beneath the light of a twinkling star in a manger in Bethlehem.

You can't have Christmas without lights. But have you ever stopped to think about the fact that we can't truly appreciate the light unless we also recognize the darkness?

N.T. Wright says it like this, "Christmas is God lighting a candle; and you don't light a candle in a room that's already full of sunlight. You light a candle in a room that's so murky that the candle, when lit, reveals just how bad things really are."

The greater the darkness, the more the light shines.

Jesus knew this to be true. Thousands of years ago, he used this same language of light and dark to speak about himself. He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Jesus was tapping into a powerful motif that began on the first page of the Bible and continues to the very last.

This Advent, we're chasing that light from Genesis to Revelation, in order to uncover how Jesus not only brings light to the world but lights up the dark places in our own lives as well. My hope is that when we come together on Christmas Eve and raise our lights high, we'll be able to experience the joy and wonder of Christmas in a brand-new way.

Director, Discipleship



DAY 1

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28



GENESIS 1:1–5, 14–19

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. 16 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.



In the beginning, there was darkness. Then, on the first day of Creation, God breaks into the darkness and speaks light into existence. God gives us the gift of day and night. Then, on the fourth day, God fills the day and night with other lights—the sun, the moon, and the stars. Now, no matter what time it is or where we are, there is always a light within view.

Together, these lights mark the passing of sacred time—days, seasons, years—the rhythm by which we live our lives. They are the first steps of God creating a world where humans can flourish. And God calls it good. These first days of Creation stand as a testament to the fact that, no matter how dark and chaotic the world may seem, God’s light will overcome.

And just like the lights that blinked on the first days of Creation, God creates each of us out of the darkness of our mother's womb. Even before we are brought into the world, God knows us and deeply desires for us to have life. We're not meant to just get by. God ordered the whole world so that we could thrive. So we could have life abundant; the good, joy-filled, satisfying life that only comes through living in God's light.



What are the bright sources of light in your life?

Where are the shadows growing in your life? Are you experiencing darkness? Today, in prayer, ask God to break through the darkness as He did in the beginning.





DAY 2

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29



GENESIS 2:7-9, 15-17

7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”



ut of the dark, rich soil of the earth, God formed the first humans. God plants them in a garden and tells them to enjoy themselves—to be fruitful and multiply! All around them, trees stretch toward the light, but two trees stand out amongst the others. First, there’s the tree of life, representing the light of God’s presence and the promise of a life spent forever with God. The other is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Up to this point, only God has defined what is good and what is not good. So, from this second tree, God tells the humans not to eat, for if they do, darkness will consume them. These first humans now face a test. Two trees. One represents light and life. The other is darkness and death. From which tree will they take?

Out of the darkness we, too, were made, birthed into a world full of dirt and grit. Our eyes are trained to see the darkness all around us, but it's much more difficult for us to recognize the potential for darkness within us. Just like Adam and Eve, we are often caught between the choice to do what is right and what feels good. Will we trust and obey God, who will keep us in the light? Or will we forge our own path, which may lead to darkness?



Spend a moment reflecting on the struggle between light and dark in your own heart and mind. Where do you feel it most?

Now, imagine you were to walk in the way that leads to darkness. What would that reality look like a year or two from now?

Now imagine you follow the way that leads to light. What would that look like a year or two from now? How can you choose light?





DAY 3

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30



GENESIS 3:1-7

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

4 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.



Darkness slithers into the Garden and the snake whispers to the first humans, making them believe that, even as they dwell in the light of the Garden, they are unable to see clearly. It lies to them. *Oh, the wonders you would see if only you'd open your eyes!*

So the humans set their gaze upon the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They see that it is desirable and pleasing to the eye. They take it for themselves and they eat. Instead of listening to the wisdom of God, they choose to do what is right in their own eyes. And their eyes are indeed opened. However, the snake didn't warn them of the consequences. Instead of seeing new wonders, humans see their own nakedness. They cover themselves from the light, hide from God, and for the first time, darkness creeps into God's good world.

We've been lied to. The world tells us that if we only rely on our own wisdom, we will have life! At first glance, it may seem like a good idea—after all, darkness is sometimes *pleasing* to the eye and seems *desirable*. But when millions of people decide for themselves what is good, it leads to chaos and darkness. Because what is good for one may not be good for another. What is right for me and my family in my own eyes may cause hurt and pain for another family that is not like mine. *This* is why God said eating of that tree would lead to death and darkness.

But thankfully, even though we've all given in to the darkness, hope is not lost. God isn't satisfied to leave us in this cycle of darkness. The entire story of the Bible is about the lengths God will go to in order to light up the dark parts of our lives.



The voice of the serpent whispers, “do what you think is best.” Where do you hear that voice echoed today in our culture? What’s appealing to us about that idea?





DAY 4

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1



EXODUS 10:21-29

21 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. 23 No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

24 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, “Go, worship the Lord. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind.”

25 But Moses said, “You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the Lord our God. 26 Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshipping the Lord our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the Lord.”

27 But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go. 28 Pharaoh said to Moses, “Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die.”

29 “Just as you say,” Moses replied. “I will never appear before you again.”



Generations after the snake first steered humans toward darkness, God’s people find themselves held captive in Egypt. On behalf of God, Moses commands Pharaoh to let God’s people go so they might worship Him in the wilderness. But Pharaoh will not relent. Nine times Moses repeats God’s request. And nine times Pharaoh refuses, each time bringing a plague upon his people. God then tells Moses to stretch out his hand, and darkness spreads over the land. Pharaoh has continued to do whatever is right in his own eyes, bringing death and darkness upon God’s people in the form of oppression and slavery. So now, God will show Pharaoh what it’s like to live in true darkness.

But in the midst of that darkness, a light shines. Like stars in an endless night, lights blink on in the homes of God's people. In the darkest season of their lives, God assures them that He has heard their cries and will not forsake them.

Just like God's people in Egypt, we too have become enslaved by spiritual darkness. In some cases, like with Pharaoh, the darkness is of our own making. We desire to go against the way of God, and we reap the consequences of that decision. In other cases, it's the decisions of others that causes darkness to spread over us. But no matter where the darkness comes from, God's desire is to bring us back into the light. God wants to rescue us from anything that would keep us in the dark, including ourselves.



What feels dark in your life right now? Describe that darkness. Where do you think it comes from? Spend a few moments in prayer. As you pray, ask God to help you see where His light is breaking in today.





DAY 5

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2



NEHEMIAH 9:5-12

5 “Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

7 “You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. 8 You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.

9 “You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. 10 You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. 11 You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. 12 By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.



God rescues His people from the darkness of slavery and leads them into the wilderness. God defeats the source of their suffering when He drowns Pharaoh’s army in the depths of the sea. God shows His people that he is a God who not only hears their cries, but will be faithful to deliver them from anything or anyone who would keep them from the light. And God remains with them, guiding them as a pillar of cloud by day and fiery light by night. It’s as if God’s people were in a dark tunnel, and the only way they know how to get out is by following the kernel of light on the other side.

The same is true for us today. When we're surrounded by darkness, it can be hard to tell which way is up or down. And if the darkness is deep enough, it's nearly impossible to find the way out on our own. But God doesn't want us to stay lost in the dark. He hears our cries and, just like the light at the end of the tunnel, He goes before us to light up the way forward.



How have you seen God lead you out of darkness in the past?

Is anyone you know experiencing profound darkness right now? What would it look like to reflect the light of God back to them today?





DAY 6

✦ **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4** ✦



PSALM 27:1-14

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.

3 Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

4 One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.

5 For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

6 Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts
of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.

7 Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.

8 My heart says of you, “Seek his face!”
Your face, Lord, I will seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me,
God my Savior.

10 Though my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will receive me.

11 Teach me your way, Lord;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.

12 Do not turn me over to the desire of
my foes, for false witnesses rise
up against me, spouting malicious
accusations.

13 I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.



God, I confess that my heart grows anxious when I think about the darkness all around me and the darkness within me. But I hold fast to your promise to be with me in the midst of that darkness. Lord, help me to believe that is true for me today. Help me to feel your light over my life, to recognize your presence even in the messy places I so want to keep hidden.

Today I fix my eyes on you, my Father, my protector, and my helper. Teach me to follow your way. Make straight my paths. Forgive me where I seek to go my own way instead of allowing your wisdom to guide my steps. And may your goodness and mercy be ever present in the forefront of my mind.

Amen.



BE THE LIGHT THIS ADVENT SEASON!

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be the light in a dark world.

So, this Advent season, we're challenging you to Be The Light by doing random acts of kindness without expecting anything in return. This could be anything from paying for someone's coffee to buying a stranger a meal at a restaurant, volunteering with your favorite non-profit, or leaving an encouraging note anonymously on someone's car.

To participate, simply pick up a stack of "Be The Light" cards at HPUMC and keep them with you. Give one away with every act of kindness. Consider writing a note of encouragement on the back to inspire the next person and continue the trend.

**LEARN MORE AND SHARE YOUR #BETHELIGHT
STORIES AT HPUMC.ORG/BETHELIGHT**



DAY 7

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5



EXODUS 19:1-8

1 On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. 2 After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

7 So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. 8 The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.



After Egypt, the people are guided by God’s light into the wilderness for 40 years. They finally arrive at Mt. Sinai where God is going to form and shape them into the nation of Israel. God tells them to remember everything they’ve been through, and He invites them to become His covenant partner. If only they will listen to Him, they will be God’s treasured people. God promises to make them into a kingdom of priests—mediators of God’s blessing to the nations. In this way, Israel will act as a light to the rest of the world. Through the way they live, others will come to know who God is and be called from darkness to light.

Just like the Israelites who came before us, God is shaping and molding us into a people. And in a world full of darkness, we too, are called to shine the light of truth, justice, love, and mercy, revealing the very character and heart of God to those around us. All of the forgiveness and love God offers us, we then pour onto others. The blessings we receive are never meant to be kept to ourselves. We were always blessed so we could be a blessing to others in return, so that others could be drawn to the light of God through us.



If a total stranger were to evaluate what you do with your blessings, what would they assume you care about most?





DAY 8

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6



JUDGES 2:16-23

16 Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord's commands. 18 Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. 19 But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

20 Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, 21 I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. 22 I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their ancestors did." 23 The Lord had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.



Israel was called to be a light to the nations. But very quickly we see they fail to uphold this sacred duty from God. The people turn to other gods or do whatever is right in their own eyes. So God raises up leaders from among them to try and lead the people out of the darkness once again. But with each new leader that arises, Israel's darkness only grows until the point where they can no longer see clearly. They are effectively blind.

The Israelites are not the only ones who turn from the light. We all give into the temptation to do whatever is right in our own eyes, to define good and not good for ourselves. We turn

to all manner of things to guide us, from money and power to popular culture, relationships, careers, politics, entertainment, you name it. But all these end up doing are blinding us to the reality that we are lost without God. We're in a dark tunnel with no way out, and no light to guide us to the exit.



What are the things, people, or powers that easily become your leading light, when you're not keeping your eyes on God?

Is it possible they're leading you in a direction you don't actually want to go?

What are you tempted to put in God's place as the guiding light in your life?

Where do you think these things are actually leading you?





DAY 9

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7



JOB 3:1-10

- 1 After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 He said:
- 3 “May the day of my birth perish, and the night that said, ‘A boy is conceived!’
- 4 That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine on it.
- 5 May gloom and utter darkness claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm it.
- 6 That night—may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months.
- 7 May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it.
- 8 May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan.
- 9 May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn,
- 10 for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes.



Job was a wealthy man, with a loving family, and lots of success. But in the blink of an eye, through no fault of his own, Job lost everything. In just one day, the livestock that fuels his livelihood are killed, along with his servants and all ten of his children through various calamities. His grief is so thick that Job curses the day he was born. Rather than face this overwhelming darkness, he’d rather never have lived at all. Job confronts God, bringing all of his emotion and anger before Him. And he learns that, even in the midst of his suffering, he can trust that God is good and wise.

For those who’ve experienced loss and pain, the holidays can be difficult. A time that is supposed to be full of joy and light may feel dark and joyless. Whether we know the suffering

we face is of our own making, or through no fault of our own, it's difficult to imagine how we might be lifted out of the mud we feel stuck in.

While God never promises His people a life without pain and loss, Job reminds us that we can bring all of our emotions before God. God can handle the complexity of our pain, our vulnerabilities and doubt. And not only that, God wants to walk with us in our pain. We serve a God who understands loss because he himself has experienced it.

We can trust that while we may not yet have the eyes to see clearly, God is still good and trustworthy no matter what circumstances we face. And we can rest assured that God's light can break into even the most overwhelming and unimaginable circumstances.



Who do you know who might be in pain this holiday season? How can you be the light for them this week in a real, tangible way?

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

THE SERVICE OF THE LONGEST NIGHT

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13 | 7 PM | COX CHAPEL

The holiday season can bring joy and peace, but for some, it can also be a time of challenging life circumstances.

We invite those seeking solace this Christmas season to a service offering respite from the difficult aspects of the holidays and a reminder of the hope we find in Jesus. Special music will be provided at this Cox Chapel service.



DAY 10

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8



ISAIAH 5:20-24

- 20 Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter.
- 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes
and clever in their own sight.
- 22 Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine
and champions at mixing drinks,
23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe,
but deny justice to the innocent.
- 24 Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw
and as dry grass sinks down in the flames,
so their roots will decay and their flowers blow
away like dust; for they have rejected the law
of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word
of the Holy One of Israel.



The darkness within Israel only continued to grow as the people and their leaders turned further from God's guiding light. They trusted in the wisdom of their own eyes for so long that they forgot how to see clearly. They called bad things good and good things bad; They traded the light for darkness, and found pleasure in it. Worse, they denied justice to those who deserved it and allowed the guilty to go free and didn't make

God's love and mercy known among the nations. So God calls upon the Prophet Isaiah to warn them about the dangers of believing they know better than God, of the judgment that will come if they continue on this path.

What happens when we choose and celebrate the darkness? The core of who we are, our character, begins to erode. Where we were designed to be whole, we are half-hearted. Where we were made to be joyful and full of peace, we are anxious, overwhelmed, and downcast. We lose our capacity to love others. The roots that we depend on to grow in maturity, to anchor us in God's light, begin to decay. We lose any ability to produce good fruit—to love others the way God loves us.

But thankfully, this isn't where the story ends.



How do you discern what is wise and unwise? What process do you go through to make good, solid decisions? How do you make room to hear God's voice in that process?





DAY 11

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9



ISAIAH 60:1-3, 18-22

1 “Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

2 See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.

3 Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

18 No longer will violence be heard in your land,
nor ruin or destruction within your borders,
but you will call your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise.

19 The sun will no more be your light by day,
nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you,
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

20 Your sun will never set again,
and your moon will wane no more;
the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your days of sorrow will end.

21 Then all your people will be righteous
and they will possess the land forever.
They are the shoot I have planted,
the work of my hands,
for the display of my splendor.

22 The least of you will become a thousand,
the smallest a mighty nation.

I am the Lord;
in its time I will do this swiftly.”



Just like before Creation, darkness hovered over the face of the earth. Only this time, it was a darkness of our own making, a direct result of the good we called evil and the evil we called good. Where God's people were supposed to be representatives of love and hope and justice, they'd become beacons of violence and pain and oppression. But all hope was not lost. Just like in the beginning, God promises to break in once more with His life-giving light.

God tells Isaiah that a day is coming where God's light will shine on His people once more. A day when sorrows shall pass and the violence will cease, because God will be our everlasting light. And so God's people looked forward to this new creation, when the veil of darkness would lift and give way to a new kind of light—a testament to God's great love for us, that no matter how dark the world became, God's desire was always to restore the light to His people.



No matter how much darkness threatens to cover the earth, God promises to break through with light. What does this make you think about what God is like?





DAY 12

✦ **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11** ✦



PSALM 82:1-8

- 1 God presides in the great assembly;
he renders judgment among the “gods”:
- 2 “How long will you defend the unjust
and show partiality to the wicked?
- 3 Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
- 4 Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
- 5 “The ‘gods’ know nothing, they understand nothing.
They walk about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- 6 “I said, ‘You are “gods”;
you are all sons of the Most High.’
- 7 But you will die like mere mortals;
you will fall like every other ruler.”
- 8 Rise up, O God, judge the earth,
for all the nations are your inheritance.



God, you are a lover of justice. You defend the weak, the poor, the oppressed among us. Father, we confess that we embraced darkness instead of your light. We have loved power and security, and rather than helping our neighbors, we served our own ambitions.

God rescue us from ourselves! Teach us to walk in your ways, to love those whom you love and offer help and hope to those who need it most. Teach us to defend the cause of the poor and oppressed, the weak and needy. And help us to recognize the weakness and need for your light within ourselves, too.

Amen.



DAY 13

MONDAY, DECEMBER 12



JOHN 1:1-14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.



In the midst of the darkness, a light flickers on. God, once again, breaks into creation to bring order to chaos and light to the places where death reigns. The Word comes to signal the end of the tunnel, directing people out of the darkness and back into the light of God's presence. To a world living in darkness, Jesus arrives. But the world which has lived for so long in darkness doesn't recognize the light, and only some trust it enough to open their eyes.

For those who do see Jesus for who he is, it's like our world is upended—like we were seeing in black and white before, and Jesus' arrival in our life brings a kaleidoscope of color. It's as

if the scales were pulled back from our eyes and we can truly see again. In Jesus, we become new creations. We have the chance to experience a new life, true life. And to every person who accepts this light, we become like a sea of little flames breaking through the darkness. This is the good news of the Gospel, the light has come for people whose world is in utter darkness! And the darkness cannot overcome it.



Is there a moment you can think of where you feel like Jesus brought light into a dark situation? What was this experience like? How did it change the way you think about your faith?





DAY 14

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13



JOHN 3:16-21

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.



God loves the world, even though the world loves darkness, and Jesus is the evidence of that love. But the sad reality is that we cannot truly appreciate who Jesus is until we see how dark and broken the world really is. Until we recognize that we are stumbling aimlessly in the dark, we'll never be willing to open our eyes to see the light of Christ.

For those who've spent enough time without the light, their eyes have already adjusted. They believe they are the ones who can see clearly. Where the dark was once intimidating, now it is comfortable, desirable even. But we were not created to live in the dark. On a physical level, too much time in the dark causes our moods to shift. We're more likely to have trouble concentrating, trouble sleeping, feel sluggish, and tend toward depression. And on a spiritual level, darkness desensitizes us to the evil of the world, and can even make us hate the things that God calls good.

So Jesus comes to call us back to the light. To show us a way forward in truth and hope, guiding us through the pain of recalibrating to the light, until our eyes are fully open once more.



What are the signs that we might be getting too comfortable in the dark? Where have you become desensitized to darkness? What does it look like to reacquaint your vision to the light?



DAY 15

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14



JOHN 12:44-50

44 Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. 45 The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

47 “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. 49 For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. 50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”



Jesus offers us a way forward, out of the darkness and into light. By believing in Jesus, our eyes can be opened to a larger reality, God’s life-giving presence with us. Jesus is like a mirror, a reflection of the One who is light and goodness embodied.

Jesus invites us to follow him, to hear and keep his words, so we may experience more of his light that leads to eternal life. Eternal life is not about an endless quantity of years, but rather the quality of those years. Jesus doesn’t want us just to live forever, he wants us to live as whole human beings. He wants us to be who we were created to be and to experience life in its fullness. A life full of joy, peace, love, hope, and companionship—the way life was meant to be lived! This is the kind of life that comes when God shines the light of Christ in our lives. The only question is whether we will step out of the darkness to embrace it.



Rest in the fact that, as our darkness is brought into the light, Jesus doesn’t condemn us for it, but seeks to save us from it. How might God be calling you to step out into the light this week?





DAY 16

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15



JOHN 9:1-7

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. 7 “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.



The Prophets looked forward to the day when the eyes of the blind would be opened, when those who lived in darkness would see light. Jesus comes to fulfill that promise. He doesn’t just walk by the blind man, he stops and takes notice of him. Jesus comes to save the world, yes, but he does so by restoring *individuals*. Jesus recognizes that darkness this man faces is a result of the broken world we live in, not some fault of his own or his family. And he teaches his disciples what it means to break into a person’s life with the healing light of God.

Jesus literally restores the man’s sight, but more importantly, he opens the man’s eyes to the reality of God’s great love for him. This is a man who likely never had experienced this love, or believed that God cared enough to notice him in the darkness.

Jesus wants to open our eyes too. He wants to chase away anything that would keep us from recognizing and experiencing God’s great love for us. It’s easy to believe that God loves

the world, but not always as easy to believe that God loves us, too. Jesus doesn't seek to condemn us for the dark crevices within us. Instead, he shines light into those dark places, into individual lives, in order to transform fear and anxiety, shame and guilt, into unexpected and incomprehensible joy!



Do you believe that God loves *you* unconditionally and wholeheartedly as you are right now? If yes, what experience can you point to that gives you the confidence in believing? If not, what do you think is keeping you from seeing God's promise as being for you, too?





DAY 17

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16



MATTHEW 27:45-54

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”



Jesus took on all of the violence and pain and humiliation that the world could throw at him as he was nailed to the cross. And it was all for us. He endured the agony of the brutal beatings, the nails in his hands and feet all so we could escape the darkness ourselves and experience God’s light.

It may seem odd to talk about the cross as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, but we cannot truly appreciate the birth of Christ if we don’t also remember the death of Christ—the

reason Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us in the first place. Jesus came to tear down the boundaries between us and Heaven—the curtain of the temple was literally torn in two when he gave up his last breath.

To rescue us from eternal darkness and despair, Jesus gave up his life. And because he endured the full force of darkness, we can now experience the fullness of life.



How does focusing on the crucifixion and death of Jesus change the way you prepare your heart for Christmas morning?



DAY 18

✧ SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18 ✧



PSALM 139:7-16

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of
the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written
in your book before one of them came to be.



God, there is nowhere we can go to escape your light, for even the darkness is light to you. You know every part of us, the good and the bad, and yet you love us anyway. You were willing to venture into the darkness for us. Jesus endured the pain and humiliation of the cross so that we could be brought back into the light of your presence.

You do not shy away from the darkness of this world, nor the darkness that is in each of us.

Thank you, God, that you don't leave us to our own devices. No matter where we go, you are with us. Father, we submit all of our dark crevices to you. Guide us into the light. So we might be light to those around us.

Amen.



DAY 19

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19



LUKE 1: 68-79

68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David
 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
 71 salvation from our enemies
 and from the hand of all who hate us—
 72 to show mercy to our ancestors
 and to remember his holy covenant,
 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
 and to enable us to serve him without fear

75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,
 78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
 by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
 79 to shine on those living in darkness
 and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”



Before Jesus was born, another son came into the world—the one who would prepare the way for Jesus. His father, overcome with emotion at the sight of his child bursts into song. He sings of God’s greatness and mercy, about how God refuses to give up on His people even when they willingly turn to darkness.

While all of us have some measure of darkness in us, God still loves us. But God also loves us too much to leave us in darkness. So God sends the sun to shine on those living in darknesses, but not just for our own benefit. The end goal is that we would become people who bring more peace into the world. Jesus shines on us so we might have the light of Christ in us.

And the world needs more people who have the light of Christ in them.



Being the light for others is not just a one-time endeavor, but a rhythm of living that starts first within ourselves. What is one thing you could do to make more room for God’s light to flood in?



DAY 20

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20



EPHESIANS 5:8-20

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

14 This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



The early church continued to use the idea of light to talk about how they ought to live and relate to the world around them. The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, warning them to stay away from anything that would bring darkness back into their world. He tells them to wake up, to open their eyes and let the light of Christ shine on them. He warns them that it *really matters* how they live—either they will produce the good fruit that comes from a life fueled by God’s light within them or they will be like empty twigs that hold no fruit and serve no real purpose.

We are all moving toward something. Either we are moving toward the light or away from it. And the closer we move toward the light, the more the things we'd rather keep hidden become exposed. This can be a painful process. It *hurts* when the secrets we want to keep buried in the dark are brought out into the light. But it really does matter how we live. It's not as if God gives us a list of rules to follow because that's just how God likes things to be. It's that the Creator of the Universe and the one who formed us knows exactly what we need to thrive and cares enough about us to take our hand and guide us into the light. We can either then decide for ourselves what we need, or trust that God is good and wise and wants what's best for us, even when that road seems difficult. The choice is ours.



Think about the last seven days. Where have you seen evidence of good fruit in your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Are there areas where the opposite is true? Why do you think that's the case?





DAY 21

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21



MATTHEW 5:13-16

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.



Before he died, Jesus gathered his followers around a mountain to hear a message from God. Jesus describes a new kind of Kingdom, an upside-down Kingdom where the first shall be last and the last first. He says that, in the way that salt kept food from decaying, God’s people can now be part of preventing the decay that darkness causes in the world.

We are called to be salt and light. Through the way we live, the way we sacrificially love others and follow the way of Jesus, we can bring light into the world. We can chase away the decay that comes through a life lived in darkness.

This is why we were created. To partner with God, to join God’s creative work in the midst of chaos and darkness, to be the light of Christ that pierces the darkness and brings hope to those who need it the most.





What does it look like to let your light shine for others today?





DAY 22

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22



1 PETER 2:4-10

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For in Scripture it says:
“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

8 and, “A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

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. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.





Years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see that his followers are being charged to fulfill Israel's original calling, to be a light to the nations. God promised to make Israel His treasured possession if they would obey the Torah, and live in such a way that God's nature and character were revealed to the world. Israel was meant to be priests—mediators between God and the rest of humanity. Now that promise is extended to Jesus' disciples—followers of the Way.

Love. Justice. Mercy. Compassion. Jesus builds these qualities into his followers, not just for their own sake, but for the sake of others. Just as Jesus is a mirror that reflects God's light, we are called to reflect the light of Christ to a hurting and broken world. We are blessed to be a blessing; Our lives are not our own. God brought us out of the darkness, out of spiritual oppression and slavery to death, so we could do the same to our neighbors who are living in darkness.

Jesus died and rose again, so we can go to those who are dying and show them the way to resurrection.



How does it change the way you think about your life, your values, your priorities, the way you spend your resources, when you consider your role as God's healing agents to a hurting and broken world?





DAY 23

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23



ACTS 2:2-12

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”



At Pentecost, we’re told tongues of fire (little lights) come and rest on each of the disciples as they are gathered together. Throughout the Bible, fire is used as a symbol for God’s presence, from Moses at the burning bush to the fiery cloud that guides Israel through the wilderness. Now, God once again brings the fire of His presence to His people. Only this time, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit. The fiery light of God’s Spirit fills the disciples so they can actually go do the work Jesus prepared them for.

In all that we do, we carry that same Spirit within us. The same Spirit that was with God in the beginning at Creation now lives within each of us! And it is only because we have God’s light within us that we are able to be a light to those around us. The Spirit is what pushes us

out of our comfort zones and helps us to wrestle with the dark pockets inside of us. And in this way, we are never alone. We don't go about the work of Jesus on our own power, but out of the overflowing of God's power within us.

Because we have God's Spirit within us, we are able to do extraordinary things beyond what we ever thought possible on our own.



Take a moment to pray the following prayer. As you say each phrase, take a deep breath in, and a deep breath out. Repeat as many times as you'd like to, inviting God's Spirit to bring light into the dark places of you:

Holy Spirit,

Breath of God, breathe into me.

Transform me.



CHRISTMAS EVE

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24

ISAIAH 9:1-7

1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

2 The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.

3 You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.

4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.

5 Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.

6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

 In Christmas Eve we are full of anticipation for the Christ child to come. The thing we've waited for all year has finally arrived. At Christmas Eve services, we sing "Silent Night" and lift up our candles in the midst of a dark room. And as our individual flame is joined by those around us we become a sea of light illuminating the entire room as we join the hosts of heaven declaring:

Alleluia!

Christ the Savior is born!

Christ the Savior is born!

This moment is a reminder that no matter how pervasive the darkness, light always wins. Just as we have seen the light of Christ, so too must the world now see the light of Christ's church. We must hold our flame high and proclaim the beauty and majesty and healing power of Christ's love within us for the world around us. This is the beauty of Christmas—it's a reminder that even in the darkest night, God is not far from us. Through the power of the Spirit, God's light lives in each of us, shining forth to light up the darkness.



As you light your candle on Christmas Eve, whether during worship or at home with your family, consider what this symbol means to you. How do you see the beauty and meaning of Christmas reflected in the light?



✦ CHRISTMAS DAY ✦ SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25

REVELATION 22:1-7

1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more

night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

6 The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

7 “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

God, today we thank you that, even though we live in a world where darkness is still apparent, we are not without hope. Today, we're reminded that the dark pockets of our world just mean that the story is not finished yet, that You are still at work in us and through us.

Help us to gaze upon the Christ child today with open eyes. We pray that Jesus' light would flow in us and through us. It's unfathomable that we get to be your partners in bringing new light into the world, that you would choose us to carry forward the light of Christ. We pray that we might never take it for granted that we carriers of your light in a broken world. And no matter what we face, what darkness threatens to overtake us, we rest assured that your light will overcome.

And we look forward with hopeful eyes to the day when there will be no more darkness—no more mourning, nor death—only the light of Christ. Until then, together we say come soon, Jesus!

Amen.



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