



ADVENT 2020
A DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET
From the people of
Bethany Lutheran Church

Advent Devotion Introduction

I remember a camp song that featured a hippopotamus (don't be too impressed with my memory, I think I first sang this song as a pastor at Confirmation Camp within the past 10 years!). Like most hymns, it isn't a theological treatise, but proves to be a pretty positive poetic portrayal (compare Genesis 1 and 2) of a creation that is "good" and humankind created in the very image of God. The refrain claims "God's *fingerprints* are everywhere..." You might even say, we see God's fingerprints when we leave ours on the box or can we drop in the food collection, the check we sign to a charity, that life-giving "like" or post via phone or keyboard or picking up and reading a couple paragraphs from a congregational devotional.

Your Bethany kinfolk have been busy doing "God's work" with their hands. They have been reflecting on the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and how this completely unexpected initiative informs our thoughts, words and deeds. How does Jesus, the "the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)", connect with you and compel you to action? God embraces the earth and all of us. Embrace Advent as a chance to recalibrate, focus and leave fingerprints of love and life as we journey together.

Pastor Peter

This Advent Devotional was lovingly written by members of Bethany Lutheran Church. The book is a resource to be used daily as we anticipate the arrival of our promised Savior. Each selection references an Advent scripture reading, and a personal reflection to be used as a conversation starter with friends, or in accompaniment with your prayer journal. However you choose to use the devotional, strive to make it part of your day during this period of waiting.

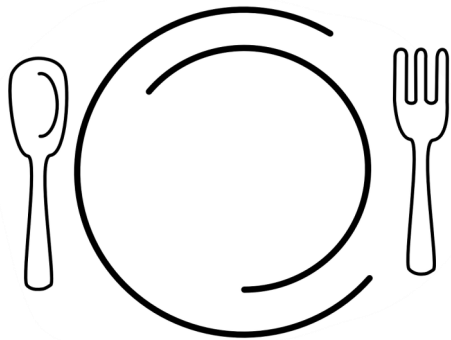
Adam Hamilton's book: "*Incarnation: Rediscovering the Meaning of Christmas*" is guiding this year's Advent theme. Each midweek service will feature a video of Mr. Hamilton's exploring the various names of Christ, as well as discussing the significance of His birth. (Available for purchase online.)

"ADVENT: a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Christmas."

Cover Artwork by Patti McCann

**A Table Prayer for Christmas
and All the Days Before and After**

God is good. God is great.
Let us thank Him for our food,
our family, and our friends.
Amen.



PRESIDENTS AND KINGS

Week One

Week 1, Day 1

Romans 13:11-14

In the mid-60's, my dad started putting up a life size nativity scene where we lived in Watertown, South Dakota and in Marshall, Minnesota. At Thanksgiving time, he made the scene from wig heads, chicken wire bodies and home-made costumes together with a stable. He did this for almost 40 years.

But something never changed, there was never a baby in the manger. Instead there was the shadow of the cross shining through blue fabric.

My dad's reason was that Jesus Christ came as a baby but did not stay a baby. He grew up and followed his mission which was to walk to the cross of Calvary.

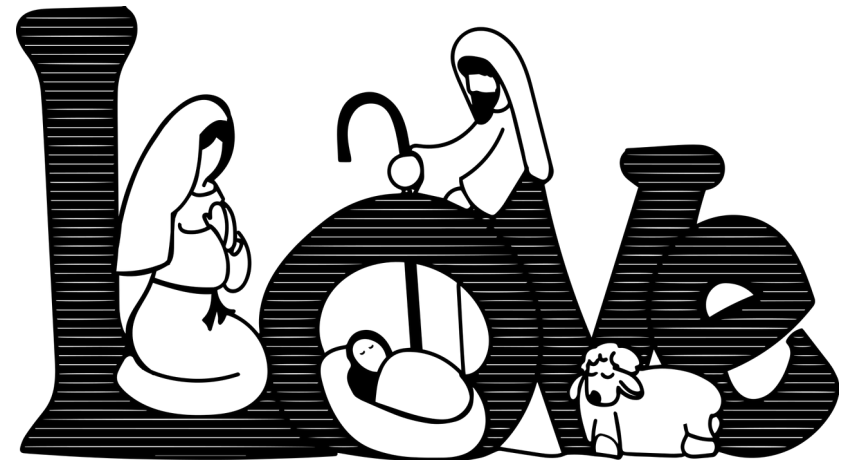
As we begin this Advent, a time of quiet and reflection, we need to remember that Jesus is our Emmanuel, God with us. Our hope is in Jesus Christ and his death and Resurrection. We need to follow Jesus through Advent and Christmas as He leads us to Lent and to Easter. Our hope is that God sent His Son out of love to die for each one of us.

May this Advent season be a time of remembering the advents of the past as we move into the future.

Lynn Marie Sulackow

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

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.



The Christmas Story according to

The Gospel of Luke 2:1-20

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,

Week 1, Day 2

1 Corinthians:3-9

Grace to you. During this season of Advent, we, as were the shepherds and as was the Corinthian church in today’s verses, wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Adam Hamilton points out in his chapter “Presidents and Kings,” the faithful at the time of the shepherds were imagining a rescuing type of savior freeing them from the injustices they were experiencing, rather than the accompanying type of Savior that Jesus proved to be.

We, the faithful, this side of Jesus’ Resurrection, have the benefit of the knowledge of Christ’s victory over sin and death and the hope of His kingdom to come. In our call to be the hands and feet of Jesus, we however still live in the world that Christ practiced his ministry in. The world that remains full of the poor, the sick, the grieving, the hungry, the imprisoned, the disenfranchised.

We look forward to Christ’s promised new heaven and earth but, in the meantime, today’s verses assure us that as a collective body of Christ we are not lacking in any of the spiritual gifts needed to participate in His ongoing mission.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your presence in our lives and for inviting and trusting us to be part of your ongoing mission of agape love.

Conrad Eastwold

Jesus often tells us to “prepare and watch”. The Gospels tell us about preparing and watching.

Be faithful: Prayer teaches us faith, the very essence of hope. The gift of faith helps us accept that God works in his own way and in his own time—which may be quite different from our way. Through faith we can accept where our knowledge ends and where trust in God begins.

Be ready: Live each day like it could be your last. Each day is a gift from God, so look for the blessings God gives us. Are you grateful no matter what? A grateful heart is much more difficult when we face trials. Gratitude lifts our spirit, changes our perspective, and softens our hearts.

Be watchful: Jesus tells us that “watching” is very important. Through prayer and reading God’s word, we can learn to recognize how God is working in our lives. The Gospels give us numerous examples of Jesus coming into people’s lives. Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:34) immediately welcomed the baby Jesus and told Mary that “this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.” Mathew 27:54 reminds us that the centurion at the cross exclaimed, “Surely He was the Son of God!” And even the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not immediately recognize Jesus. Will we be watching for Him or will we be caught off guard?

Joan and Rick Benson

Beloved Child of God,

I pray that the words from your friends and neighbors brought joy to you this Advent season. I imagine that you have found creative ways to celebrate the greatest gift of all – Emmanuel, “God with Us” – this season and I’m sure this is a year that you will not soon forget.

Over the last few days, I’ve been hearing bits of my 2020 Easter sermon resound in my head, “while it was still dark” (John 20 verse 1). A sermon written and recorded from my basement while I tried to find hope in the risen Lord, early in this pandemic. While it may still be dark, literally with the winter solstice and metaphorically with the ongoing pandemic, I’ve gotten better at finding the rays of light that break through the dark unknown. I see it in you, dear reader, for your persistence to adapt and keep moving forward. I see it in my children who generate moments of laughter every single day. I can see glimpses of light over the past several months and I hope that you have, too.

Today, and every day, may we continue to remember that “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it” (John 1 verse 5). May the Light of Christ fill you with Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy.

Pastor Luci

Week 4, Day 7

Luke 2:25-33

As we sat down to write our devotion, we had just put up our Christmas tree and turned on its lights. It is not decorated yet, but the lights immediately gave us both a sense of calm and brought a smile to our faces. Adam Hamilton's Chapter 4 "The Light of the World" explains a lot about why the light from the tree brings us the feelings of calmness and peace.

At first, we felt silly getting out the Christmas tree two and a half weeks before Thanksgiving, but then we found out two of our daughters already had their trees up. It appears the line from the musical, Mame, "For we need a little Christmas, right this very minute," applies to a lot of us right now.

The need for a bright light amid the pandemic we are facing is great. Many of us are missing our families. All three of our daughters and their families live in areas where COVID 19 is spiking. Travel and indoor gatherings are not sensible when we care about the health of our loved ones. So, another light in the darkness, a Zoom gathering.

Adam Hamilton says, "We are God's plan for changing the world. We are not just passive recipients of God's love and grace." We need to reflect the bright light that God gave us in his son Jesus, outward to our families, community, and the world.

John and Kathy Osterloth

Week 1, Day 4

John 1:1-5

Choices. In this Advent season, we have events put upon us that are most likely not what we would have chosen. Yet we still have the gift of electing how to act upon these events in a way that honors our God and each other. We have the gift of choice even when we did not choose our circumstances.

And with such division around us, making the correct choices with our health, our community, our children, our lives and our world, it is worth taking a step back on our own views of right and wrong, justice or prejudice, fairness or intolerance...and consider Mary and Joseph.

This is where the miracle of the season comes in...a young boy and girl did what many of us would like to say we would do, but we will never be challenged to do it today. We need to say 'Yes' to God's call and utter trust and confidence.

Advent a time for us to look back at Joseph and Mary. To look back 2,000 years past our selfish wants and look into the eyes of those who need us. We should acknowledge those who yearn for our love, our sympathy, and our ability to help. We do look at the same light Joseph and Mary did, and follow their selfless choice: the hard choice/the right choice...the choice to say, 'YES,' to Christ.

Andy and Wendy Denison

Week 1, Day 5

John 1:6-9

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7. He came as a witness to testify to the light, that all might believe through him. 8. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

The gospel of John has begun with introducing us to Jesus' relationship with God, and what he had been doing before his coming to earth. These verses 6 through 9 tell us of John who was sent from God to testify to Jesus, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." John had been preaching repentance of sin; he had gathered a numerous following for his word; he now is beginning to tell of the coming of that true light, and assuring all that he, John is not the one to follow but Jesus who IS the light and life.

All scripture is meant for us to apply to our own work for the Lord Jesus. Our life may be filled with helping others, working for the church, leading a good life. But we must make sure that we are making honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, always our message and our center. During this season of Advent when we are so occupied with preparations for the celebration of the birth on earth of our Lord Jesus, let us never fail, in our hearts, in our words to others, to express our joy and thankfulness to the Lord God for the gift of our Lord Jesus, our leader and our Savior.

Lee Haight

Week 4, Day 6

Isaiah 2:1-5

Advent is the time of the year we anticipate the coming of Jesus. God is sending his son to save all mankind. While on earth Jesus will teach, learn, and lead through God's love. As we learn about what Jesus coming means to God's people, we relish in the knowledge that God had our salvation in mind when he sent his son. So, as we celebrate Advent, let us consider what Jesus' coming should inspire us to do. We should show love, gratitude and concern for all. O house of Jacob come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Mal Bailey

Week 4, Day 5

Matthew 4:14-16

The first thing we noticed in Matthew 4, is how the Advent wreath is not only used as a countdown to Christmas, but when all four candles are lit, it is the most-light which happens on Jesus's birthday. Jesus is the light of the world.

With so much darkness in the world, the pandemic and unrest, we honestly believe in our home that it is in God's hands. But where is the light for those who do not believe? Why is there so much darkness when there should be so much light? People have lost their way. They forget to remember God's light or why we are on this earth in the first place--to live life as God taught us to.

God does not ask us to be perfect. The phrase "the light at the end of the tunnel" has changed its meaning for us. The light of God is always walking with you. Every Christmas we do Toys for Tots. It is a lot of work collecting everything but knowing there are children out there who will get something for Christmas makes it worthwhile. We tell our children the best gift is to give, not to receive.

The three wisemen were secret Santa's. They heard of the baby being born and set off to follow a bright star in the sky. They brought gifts asking nothing in return. Until reading this we never thought of this story of the three wise men that way, but it really makes sense. This season follow the light like the three wise men did.

Rich, Angie, and Connor Carr

Week 1, Day 6

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Righteous defined as "doing right" certainly has been our platform of life for a combined total of 167 years. Have we made mistakes? Of course, we have. Our faith in Jesus and the laws He provided us with is the spiritual foundation of which we have built those many years. We had our responsibilities to provide for 4 children (now grown of course). Duke on the road and Marlene in the home and doing the family errands. This allowed us a very unique lifestyle of family weekends together to "catch up" on family and worship the Lord. After retirement, (27 years now) we chose to "do right" by becoming involved in various volunteer activities here in Rice Lake. (Bethany Church, Schools, Hospital, Civic & Fraternal Organizations) This has provided us with what we consider living the "Advent Life of Truth" 12 months of the year. The past 9 months have reduced this activity, but our hearts are still directed toward those many memories as we set out as Jesus directs us. The pandemic raging now, is certainly a period of Advent 2020 – WAITING!!

Duke Thurs

Week 1, Day 7

Isaiah 60:19-22

I NEED “This little light of mine/ I’m going to let it shine!”

Covid-19, loss of jobs, separation, sleepless nights, tragedy, depression, divorce, death, Cancer, anxiety, day-light savings time, politics, alcohol, drugs, heart disease, and more darkness keeps pressing in upon us. We see it, we feel it, and so do our family and our friends.

Where is the light, the silver lining, and the hope? It is easy to get down, sad, angry, and negative with all that is going on. However, Christ has called **US** to be lights, **HIS** lights. In John 8:12, Jesus says He is the light of the world. The key is to reflect the Son of God, Jesus Christ. If we reflect Christ’s light to the world by our thoughts, words, and actions, we have a good chance to be the change we want to see in the world.

Each night when the moon is visible, spend a moment looking at it, and pray that nothing clouds Jesus Christ’s light in your life. Others need to see the Light, and **YOU** may be the only person they know who reflects Him.

We may not be able to see your smile under the mask, but like we tell our students, we can see their eyes smiling! Shine **BRIGHT** and keep **SMILING** you amazing children of God.

Chuck and Susie Carr

Week 4, Day 4

Luke 2:8-20

Of course, they were terrified. Here we have a group of lowly shepherds probably sitting around a campfire after the evening meal sharing stories. Not only does an angel of the Lord appear before them, but “the glory of the Lord shone around them...”

We can recall many nights up on Lake Superior watching the Northern Lights. This awesome display of multi-colored lights dancing across the sky gives us a small idea of the shepherd’s experience. “A multitude of heavenly host praising God” completes the angel’s message.

And what a message it is: **The Word has become flesh. God has come to live among us. Mankind is reconciled to God.**

Little is told of the shepherd’s actual visit to Bethlehem. However, “when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed...”

Like the shepherds, we should also spread the word of Christ’s birth. Adam Hamilton tells us in his book, “We are not just passive recipients of God’s love and grace”. The light we receive from God is not meant to be kept within ourselves. Just as we pass the candlelight from one to another in our Christmas Eve services, we share the light with one another in our daily lives. As we do, like in the church service, “the darkness recedes bit by bit, the kingdom of God expands, and the world is changed”.

Ron & Bonnie Dahl

The light of God

He shows us how to live our lives daily. His light also brings joy, love and hope to others through our actions.

During Advent we celebrate the coming of Jesus. Our spiritual light is strong as we light candles and decorate to prepare for Jesus's birthday.

We must remember that light comes from darkness as told in Genesis 1. The birthday of Jesus, December 25, was an intentional day picked as they did not know this exact day of His birth. It was the winter solstice on the Julian calendar from the Roman Empire era. What better day to celebrate than when the days are getting longer, and light pushes back darkness? The light of God.

Darkness can come over all of us at one time or another. We experience grief, sadness and our life seem out of control. With faith in God we can move from those dark days. During Advent we look to the light and remember that the birth of Jesus is God's word to us. Let us strive to walk into His light with darkness behind us.

Jill Holtegaard

THE SAVIOR AND OUR NEED FOR SAVING

Week 2

Week 2, Day 1

Romans 15:4-13

As I read these verses from Romans, I am drawn to three words: steadfastness (endurance), encouragement, and hope. We are preparing for the birth of Jesus, God's word incarnate or God's word made flesh. Each year we celebrate Jesus' birth and I sometimes wonder if we really celebrate all that his birth means. Jesus was a fulfillment of a promise made generations before, giving us a living example of the life God calls us to embody. His birth is a renewal of life for me. A living promise of all that Jesus' ministry taught us about love. The love parents have for their newborn that never goes away, but grows in depth and strength through the years: steadfast love – a glimpse of God's love.

Christmas to me is like God opening another door to understanding what it means to be a Christian. I am that newborn child, for a moment, vulnerable, searching for acceptance, love, encouragement and hope. Christ is walking with me, letting me lean on him, stumble and fall, but always accepting me as his child; called as his own – precious and loved. Always loved. Steadfast love: love that encourages and never fails.

In Romans, Paul writes that he hopes for us to have the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had. What a generous hope Paul had for all of us. I believe that if we remember the Love God sent to us at Christmas; the Love that grew up to show us how to live the life for which God calls us; the Love that God gave so generously to die on the cross; that we can live in harmony with one another.

Hope is an unending song, deep within my heart that I recognize as a gift of God's grace through Christ Jesus. The celebration of Jesus' birth strengthens and renews that hope, because I know God's word is steadfast and endures, and he never gives up on me.

Deberra Slagstad

Week 4, Day 2

Zephaniah 3:14-17

The words in Zephaniah 3: 14-17 are to the faithful Israelites and inhabitants of Jerusalem as a promise of what is to come--given with great joy and exultation. These words send a strong reassuring message of hope, joy, and promise. Relating this scripture to Advent today, I immediately go to: "Sing aloud," "Rejoice and exult with all your heart."

Singing and rejoicing is a way Christians have always expressed the deep feelings in their hearts. The announcement of the birth of the Christ child is a pinnacle of celebration. The reality of 2020: We cannot gather shoulder to shoulder and sing praises and worship as a congregation in person. But there is NO less joy in our hearts as we worship wherever we are and wait for the time when we will once again worship together.

The Word, as John 1 says, came to us as a humble child, to live in our midst, to teach, and to be our Savior. He came as "the light of the world" for us to follow. He is God's ultimate gift, light incarnate, the embodiment of God, made flesh, a light to ALL people. We are reminded in the lighting of the Advent candles that the coming of the "light of the world" is near. This "light" is never failing and always with us to sustain and encourage us. Through Him the victory is ours.

Carol Sevals

Week 4, Day 1

Isaiah 11:1-10

One January day in 2007, a young man stood at the top of an escalator playing his fiddle for 45 minutes. It was rush hour and more than a 1,000 folks walked by, though only a three-year-old child stopped to listen. There were other youngsters with parents who were intrigued, but their parents urged them to keep walking. Six people stayed for a short time; twenty people gave money without stopping to listen.

None noticed or acknowledged Joshua when he stopped playing. He was left to pack his instrument having earned a mere \$32 in 45 minutes. The week previous Joshua Bell played to sold out audiences with his \$3.5 million dollar violin in New York and Boston. Perception was the key to his performance in the subway station; he was perceived as an ordinary lad picking up a few dollars in the Metro.

Jesus did not judge anyone. This Advent season we need to strive to love others as Jesus loves us.

Roxie Olsen

Week 2, Day 2

Psalm 43:3-5

For us – there are 2 things central to Advent – lights and music. These two in combination provide us with hope and promise.

We participate in candlelight snowshoe walks in parks around us. Those little candles (luminarias) that shine in the darkness light our way on the trails. They are small and many are needed to light our path. It makes no difference that each one is just a single flame because when all are shining, they are more than adequate to light our way.

For us, music also speaks to our hearts during the season of Advent. There are two songs we love – one used during the season – Christ Be Our Light. We long for the light, we wait in darkness, praying that Christ's light in us will shine through that darkness. And we seek to support others showing our light to others. Our prayer: "Christ Be Our Light".

Everyone has a light to shine through them. Haven't we learned that each of us is loved by God? Whether rich or poor, whether white or black or any color/shade in between, whether red or blue, whether gay or straight, His light exists in each of us. Let it shine. We need many lights along the path we are on.

Ted and Carol Hakala

I read this Psalm and asked myself, “What kind of Christian am I?” Certainly not as brave as the psalmist, for I do have fears. This year has been filled with them—COVID-19 and the effect it could have on friends and family, and political and social unrest that disrupts the effectiveness of government. And, too, the observed acting out of public violence, climate extremes that threaten our homes and safety, a faltering economy and financial instability damaging the well-being of so many. All of these, in addition to the personal concerns having to do with the rigors and losses brought about by age.

I read the Psalm again and believe all the events that trigger our fears are transient. They come and are with us for a time, and then will pass. In the end, the gift we prepare to celebrate during Advent, the gift of Christ, wipes out these fears, and in time they will fall away. We can be confident as we have His promise, that the struggles of this age will pass. We can endure and we can have hope. In Christ we have seen the victory won. Glory be to God!

Maxine Indrebo

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

WEEK FOUR

My wife, Keren, and I are anticipating the birth of our first grandchild in the spring. Elisabeth, our younger daughter, and her husband, Peter, are expecting a baby. Elisabeth and Peter went out to eat with friends. The next day they heard that one of their friends had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Of course, they had to report to their workplaces that they had been exposed. They were told to quarantine at home and get tested.

At this point, my mind went to the “what ifs.” What if COVID-19 caused birth defects in the unborn child? I remember when I was young, that the German measles sometimes caused birth defects if a pregnant woman contracted it. We do not know everything about COVID-19. I prayed about it and left my worry and burden at God’s throne of grace, because God is for us and God is with us, Immanuel.

God is with us always, Immanuel. During Advent, we live in God’s grace and we look forward in anticipation to celebrate the coming of grace in the birth of Jesus. The Apostle John wrote in John 1:17: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” As Christians, we live in God’s love and grace, and we look forward in hope of God’s grace to come.

Elton Jorde

God gives us light in so many ways: the obvious ways like the sun, moon and stars; everyday lights like lamps, flashlights, bonfires. I see God’s light in sunflowers and the eyes of children.

In a recent Facebook entry, there was a picture of a lighted match with the caption “Light does not make a shadow.” The match has a shadow. The light does not. God does not make a shadow or bring darkness to our lives. He brings only light. In this time of Covid with all the darkness, God still sends light to guide us.

Drive-in church has been a light in my life, a joy being with God’s people, hearing his word even though alone in my car. God shows his light, his love through those who lead, those who serve as guides and helpers and those, like me, who participate. We leave feeling uplifted. The streamed services are also carriers of God’s light, his Word.

We can be carriers of God’s light by helping others through this time, by showing love and care and through prayers. Thank you, Lord, for your light in our lives. Help us to carry your light to others as we observe your ordinances.

Shirly Sorenson

Week 2, Day 5

John 12:35-36

2020 has offered some of us many opportunities to quietly reflect on our lives. When we cannot be with family and friends, cannot share hugs or handshakes, we have learned what separation is and how badly it affects us.

Advent is a time to think about the coming of Jesus and what that means to us. Not only is he bringing light and joy at his birth, but we as Christians know what is to come...his death on the cross to save us sinners. The verse talks about the light being with us a little longer. We need to take that light (love) into our hearts to keep it shining; to help us be helpful to others around us, caring, compassionate, and kind. If we allow that light to die, we will have a very dark world.

Heavenly Father, keep reminding me of “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine, Shine all around the world.” A song I learned as a 3-year-old in Sunday School sitting at my mother’s knee. Amen.

Carol Stanonik

Week 3, Day 6

John 9:1-7

“Neither this child nor the parents sinned; this child was born with a disability so that God’s works might be revealed in them.

As a social worker of 34 years, I have had many opportunities to work with parents whose child was born with a significant disability. The words, “What did I do wrong?” “What did I do to deserve my child having this disability?” “Why did God do this to us, or, to this child?” “Why us?” were repeated over and over throughout the years.

And yet, how often have we been amazed at the ability of a person to master a skill we cannot perform, and that person was born with a significant disability. God’s works comes in all shapes and sizes: someone who is autistic displays genius math or musical skills; a person without limbs can play a musical instrument at a professional level; a person who requires total care has the ability to ‘light up’ any room they are in; someone with a significant disability is the reason a sibling becomes a doctor, a nurse, a caregiver and shares that calling with others. The list goes on and on. Truly, “God works might be revealed in them.”

Mary Updike

Week 3, Day 5

Isaiah 40:1-11

As we enter into the season of Advent (meaning coming), we are preparing our hearts and minds for Christmas and what the birth of Jesus means to all Christians. These verses in Isaiah were written to bring words of comfort and peace to the captives during their time of war. Isaiah also prophecies of the coming of Christ Jesus and how His life and death will bring salvation, peace and comfort to all believing sinners. We are assured that someday we will have peace and be with our God.

Isaiah also shares the message that we need to bring this good news to others. Emmanuel (God with us) is greatly needed in our current pandemic, along with the violence and hatred that is plaguing our world. As Christians, we need to share Jesus's love and the message of salvation with all people. Following are some additional thoughts to contemplate:

The task ahead of us is never as great
as the Power behind us.

We don't change the message; the message changes us.

God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called.

God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage.

If God is your Co-pilot, swap seats.

Blessings in this season of Advent.

Helen Schmidt

Week 2, Day 6

Ephesians 5:6-14

Every day we wake up and can choose how our day goes. Every night we can reflect on those choices. Some may say the journey is more important than the destination. I can say my journey is different than you. We all have the same goal though. Leaving the darkness and living in the light. Can I do better? Absolutely! We all can. With everything going on in the past nine months it has been difficult knowing what to believe and what not to believe. I finally had to stop watching the news as I was getting pulled in all directions. I have to say my state of mind is much better.

My mom always says, "What will be, will be." I try to live every day as if it were my last. I know I have prayed more and harder than I have before. I am thinking God might think I am rambling at times. Because I am. LOL

When I was young and prayed before bed, I would feel a tingle in my heart. I lost that and have been trying to get that back. A work in progress. I am not perfect, and God knows that.

So, I wake up everyday and choose to be amazing and every night ask myself: "Did I do enough?" I have got this and so do you.

Diana Halvorson

Week 2, Day 7

Luke 2:8-12
Matthew 1:20b-21

I remember these two verses from my childhood when we would participate in the youth Christmas program on cold Sunday mornings each December. I recall feeling proud that we got to share a message as big as this, spend time with family and friends, and also the large bag of peanuts and candy treats we received at the end was a bonus.

As a high school student, the Christmas programs changed to the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. The students led that service and again shared the message found in these verses. There was something about standing in the church, lights off, holding that tiny burning candle and hoping the wax did not drip; singing with family and friends that brought a sense of peace to my life and all was right with my world.

I pray we find comfort and faith this year as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Hearing those words ~ *She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, 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.*

Kara Lundequam

Week 3, Day 4

John 3:16-21

The words for Advent are HOPE, PREPARATION, JOY and LOVE. Pretty nice words! The dictionary says Advent is “The arrival of a notable person.”

For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son. What will we give up for those we love? Our stuff, our money, our lives?

In our time of COVID, healthcare workers risk their lives every day for folks they may not even like. Law enforcement members offer their lives to protect others.

So, what can we ‘Normal People’ do? In this Advent season let’s think of ways we can do something to help others: Food Pantry, Spirit of Christmas, Salvation Army, United Way and the list goes on. Let us all see what “God-like” effort we can make.

Lord help us to help those less fortunate than ourselves. Amen.

Paulette and Bun Hanson

God is light! There is a foundational affirmation of our faith. Thus, to be in fellowship with God is to live in the light as Jesus is in the light. How do we prove to God, to others and ourselves that we truly live in the light of God? The author answers this question in 2:9: “Whoever says, ‘I am in the light,’ while hating a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light and there is no cause for stumbling.”

In this moment of great division in our country, we are being reminded of who it is who deserves our love: neighbors who think or vote differently from ourselves; people whom we ignore who provide care to the sick and dying; those who deliver goods and stock the shelves with food supplies. All who risk themselves in the service to others. To appreciate even honor all who struggle in this pandemic is to live in the light as he is in the light.

O Christ, who ever enters our world to heal us, come again to renew our hearts and institutions of the malice that divides. Shed the light of your love upon us once again, we pray. Amen

Ramon Hunt

Emmanuel
in the Midst of a Pandemic
Week 3

“Rise and Shine!”

Isn't it strange the things that we remember? Although I don't remember exactly how I would wake up my own children each morning, I do remember how my parents woke me up long ago – always a cheerful, sing-song voice “rise and shine!” I didn't know that they were quoting scripture each morning. I just knew that it was intended to be a happy start to the day.

As I think about that simple directive, it says a lot about attitude. It's not “Get up! Trudge through the day!” Rather, “It's a new day – make it a great day!”

Here's another memory of light and sun that makes me smile. Back when our family of six was very involved with basketball, there was one particularly tough loss that we all felt. The next morning, the kids were silently eating breakfast, still feeling glum about the previous night's loss. Their dad came into the kitchen, not saying anything until he got to the kitchen window and looked up at the sky. “Well, look at that. The sun DID come up.” There were a few sighs, but the point was made. The sun will always rise. The Light of the World is always present.

Jesus is the Light of the World. Advent is a time of waiting for that Light.

Tammy Lundquist

This Advent Season, God is at work in our lives through the promise of God's word. God is at work in our lives as we remember that “the Holy Spirit has called us through the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, and sanctified and kept us in the one true faith.” (Luther's Small Catechism)

God is at work in our lives by “unveiling,” by shining light into our darkness and by leading us to see God by looking in the face of the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ who is “the image of God.”

God is at work in our lives as we sing together, “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?” God wants us to know who we are going to meet not only in the manger but also when our Lord comes again.

God is at work in our lives as we worship together, as we celebrate our baptisms and as we come to the Lord's table. As we worship, we are reminded of the promise of Jesus: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

God is at work in our lives past, present and the future bringing to us God's word of love for us. “Come Lord Jesus be our Guest.”

Pastor Sam Kochel