

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2021
HIGH BRIDGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Trees are going up, presents are being wrapped, and chestnuts are roasting on an open fire. The season is upon us! But what season? Though we may be greeted with “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Holidays” wherever we may go, it is not the Christmas season. Not yet. It is the Advent season—a season of waiting, of preparation, of anticipation.

Advent comes from a Latin word (*adventus*) which means ‘to come.’ During the season of Advent, we take time to think about three different advents of Christ:

- the coming of Christ as a human child
- the coming of Christ to bring a new heaven and new earth
- the coming of Christ in people and places here and now

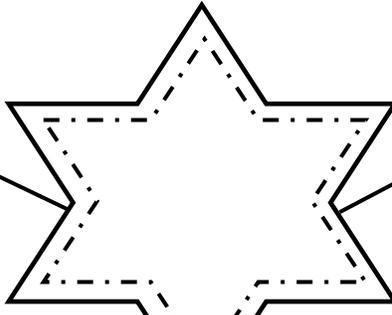
During the season of Advent we prepare for each of these ‘comings.’ Throughout these four weeks, let us anticipate with hope, with peace, with joy, and with love the coming of Christ. Let us celebrate the advent of Christ’s birth before we celebrate the birth itself. When someone wishes you a “Merry Christmas,” consider wishing them a “Happy Advent!”

This booklet contains reflections of scripture from members and friends of High Bridge Presbyterian Church. It also contains several other offerings to aid you in observing a holy Advent – candle lighting liturgies from the Presbyterian Mission Agency, a meditative coloring Advent calendar from Praying in Color, and a few favorite recipes for members of the church (taste and see that the Lord is good!)

May your Advent season be filled with hope in God, the peace of Christ, the joy of the Spirit, and the love of the Creator.

Rev. Dr. Amy Fetterman
Transitional Pastor
High Bridge Presbyterian Church
Advent 2021

Christmas



Dec 22

Dec 21

Dec 23

Dec 24

Dec 15

Dec 17

Dec 19

Dec 20

Dec 16

Dec 18

Dec 9

Dec 14

Dec 10

Dec 13

Dec 12

Dec 11

Dec 5

Dec 6

Dec 7

Dec 8

Dec 4

Dec 3

Dec 2

Nov 28

Nov 29

Advent 2021

Nov 30

Dec 1

November 28

Sunday

Advent Candle Lighting – The Candle of Hope

We light this candle in hope. *Light the first candle.*

Hear God's promise of hope from Jeremiah 33:14-16:

"The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Let us pray:

Faithful God,
out of death you bring life.
Renew us in hope,
that we may be alert
to the burgeoning of Christ's advent among us.
God of promise, God of hope,
into our darkness come.

Let us sing:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*



1ST SUNDAY OF *Advent*

November 29

Isaiah 7:10-17

The Old Testament is a great treasure chest in which a wealth of truth about God lies waiting for us to discover. No Christian can fully understand the New Testament's revelation of God if they have not seen a glimpse of the wealth as explained in the Old Testament.

Jesus said to his disciples ***"Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the Kingdom of Heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures, as well as old."*** (Matthew 13: 52) Isaiah's predictions about Jesus seems to fit two eras in history: Isaiah's and into the future. 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah predicted, during his era, the coming of Christ. (Isaiah 7: 14) ***Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel which means "God is with us"***. The name Immanuel was meant to convince Ahaz that God could rescue him from his enemies.

In the New Testament, Matthew (1:22-23) records what took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah: ***The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel - which means, "God with us."*** Jesus was the final fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah's time to the very present time. New Testament writers recognize the prophecies about Jesus and quote Isaiah 50 times. Immanuel is "God with Us" in the fullest sense.

On October 24, 2021, Skid's Class studied this very scripture - Isaiah 7:10-17. Scott explained how he saw this scripture and how it applies to us today. He described this passage as a spiderweb, with God in the center of the web. A spiderweb is a wheel-like structure with sticky spirals and spokes radiating outward from the center. Once this temporary spiral is finished, the spider crafts the web by working toward the center from the outer frame. While all the spiderwebs may look similar, no two are exactly alike. We, as followers of Christ, take different paths to Him. Some paths are longer, others shorter, and some more direct while others are indirect. We may even stop or reverse our path. All paths have a sticky substance which keeps us from falling off our path - Immanuel. Regardless of the path we take during our temporary spiral through life, we know, as Isaiah in the Old Testament and Mathew in the New Testament told us - "God is with us" as we are seeking to get to the center of our destination: the kingdom of heaven to be with Christ.

Prayer: Praying you'll feel the presence of Immanuel and that you'll draw strength and hope as you trust "God is with us" always.

~ Becky and Scott Hannah

November 30

Isaiah 11:1-9

You may have heard about the human brain's amazing ability to "fill in" missing information. In one study, an MIT professor asked people with normal vision to cover one eye and look at shapes with the other open eye. What they discovered was that nearly instantaneously, participants described the squares they were seeing as rectangles, stretching toward the blind eye. In other words, the brain *filled in* the information on behalf of the blinded eye to create a full picture.

Similarly, our brains are wired to assess risk. To remember past pain and protect us from that danger in the future. To look around and uncover all the natural enemies that lurk around the corner.

Though I'm less likely to get eaten by lions these days, I wonder how often my brain is "filling in" the threats around me?

Who—or what—are my natural enemies day-to-day?

What causes me to stumble, react, or lash out with my words and my actions? When do I choose to turn away and protect what's "mine"? When do I rationalize my judgments because of the threat someone poses to my privilege, comfort, or convenience?

The versus ends painting a picture of an earth full of the knowledge of the Lord. While that divine future isn't in my control, the ability to center Him in my daily life is. And with it, the ability to cultivate His peace in the world I move through every day.

Prayer: Lord, as one of your creatures I long to live in peace, reconciled to You and at rest with my enemies. But, it's hard to imagine a world I've never seen. I pray that your Spirit will help me "fill in" a vision of the world as you intend it—free of threat—so I can pause, reflect, and choose actions worthy of your Kingdom.

~ Erin Braford

Buttermilk Waffles

Scott Hannah

Ingredients

2 cups Krusteaz Buttermilk Waffles Pancake Mix

1 1/2 cups cold water

1 egg

2 tablespoon vegetable oil

Directions

Blend all ingredients together.

Pour batter onto lightly greased and preheated waffle iron.

Cook waffles until steaming stops or until golden brown.

Serve with syrup or your favorite fruit and whipped cream.

This is a favorite of the Hannah grandchildren: Nicole, Aaron, Ben, Katie, and Tucker!

December 2

Isaiah 35:1-7

Some say Isaiah is the greatest of all prophets. Samuel instituted the office of the Prophet to serve with the priests and speak for God. True Prophets forcefully proclaimed the truth and called the people to turn from sin, repent and return to God. Since their messages were confrontational, prophets were rarely popular with the people. Isaiah tried to help the people understand God's true nature, however they ignored his repeated warnings. Isaiah served for 60 years before he was executed (according to extrabiblical sources).

In our scripture selection today, we read how God's hatred of all sin brings us his judgement. Imagine how courageous Isaiah was, fearlessly proclaiming God's word. Because of God's love for all, He has mercy for us who are less than perfect but are sincerely seeking forgiveness with a desire to obey. Isaiah continues to tell us of the days AFTER God's judgment, when at last life will be peaceful. We see God's mercy demonstrated. Listen to what Isaiah says. Apply it to our own lives. Let us repent and trust in God's redemption through our Savior, Jesus Christ whose birth we celebrate each year at Christmas. *

Prayer: Hear the confessions of our hearts, O God, and in your mercy, forgive us. Amen.

~ Sue Braford

*(Source: Life Application Bible, The Living Bible, © 1988 Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. & Youth for Christ/ USA Wheaton, Illinois.)

December 3

Isaiah 40:1-11

This passage from Isaiah had to be a “comfort” to the people of Israel after spending 50 years of servitude at the hands of the Babylonians, but it should also be a great comfort to us today.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah warned the Israelites of the punishment and suffering they would endure, because once again they had looked to other nations and idols for their security rather than placing their trust and faith in God. They had lost their way as we so often do by believing that we will find happiness in all of the glitter and glamour of the holidays.

I love the holidays and this time of year when we gather with family and friends to exchange gifts, enjoy good meals, and share conversation. All of this brings us happiness and joy, but the season ends, our friends and families return to their own homes and the new gizmos and gadgets that we received as gifts lose their luster.

We must remind ourselves that true happiness and joy can only be found when we place our trust and faith in God. It is so easy to allow the clutter of our lives (the hills and valleys) to obstruct our view. We must remember God’s promise that he will carry us through the challenges of life, just as a shepherd carries the baby lambs, if we abide by his word.

Call someone today that you wouldn’t normally call simply to let them know that you are thinking of them. Visit a neighbor who might easily be forgotten during this holiday season. It just might bring you tidings of comfort and joy.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that by placing my trust and faith in you, I will find comfort even when I struggle. Amen.

~ Bob Gilbert

December 4

Isaiah 49:13-15

♪ *_O, tidings of Comfort and Joy,
Comfort and Joy!
O, tidings of Comfort and Joy.* ♪ _

♪ *_God rest ye merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay.
Remember, Christ, our Savior
Was born on Christmas day . . .* ♪ _

Isaiah saw Him coming! In his prophecies, he told the people of the Good News that Christ would come to bring Comfort and Mercy to the afflicted – and Joy:

Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people. And will have mercy on His afflicted.

Isaiah 49:13

Who among us has not needed Comfort and Joy? Daily - probably. I know I have my moments and even days of discouragement and frustrations, loneliness and fatigue. When this happens, I have a choice. I can slide into these feelings deeper and deeper, or I can remember the Comfort and Joy that is always there for me when I reconnect with the Lord.

In verse 15 of Isaiah 49, Isaiah reassures us that the Lord “will not forget you.” Our God is constant. An ever-presence. I am the one who wanders away. I am the one who forgets. And I am the one who can come back and thrive in His Comfort, Mercy, and Joy.

I pray to remember:

Breathing in, I experience the Comfort of God.

Breathing out, I feel the Joy of God.

Thanks be to our Merciful God.

Amen.

♪ *_O, tidings of Comfort and Joy.* ♪ _

~ Nancy Johnston

December 5

Sunday

Advent Candle Lighting – The Candle of Peace

We light this candle in hope. *Light the first candle.*

We light this candle for peace. *Light the second candle.*

Hear Zechariah's song of hope for peace to the Christ child.

A reading from Luke 1:76-79:

"You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

to give knowledge of salvation to his people

by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon us,

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Let us pray:

God of hope, Prince of Peace,

You speak peace into the world

in the Way of the Christ child.

Help us embody your peace

and live as peacemakers

that we may be called children of God.

God of hope, God of peace,

into our darkness come.

Let us sing:

O come, Desire of nations, bind

All peoples in one heart and mind;

Bid envy, strife, and discord cease;

Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.



2ND SUNDAY OF *Advent*

The Beginning

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.

Who has ever been afraid of the dark? As a child, I was afraid of the dark. What if there were monsters lurking in the closets or under the bed? Even as an adult, I still can be afraid of the dark. What is lurking outside? The darkness presents an unknown and uncertainty. We want to be able to see what is out there. Luckily, we have light.

Light can be natural or manmade. We use light every day. We turn on a light switch when we enter our home or a different room. We use a light when we drive at night. We use a flashlight when we are camping. Sometimes lights are on automatically, like roadway lights or EXIT signs or even when we open our refrigerators. Lights are used to illuminate tvs, computer screens, car dashboards, washing machines and many other things. All of these different ways of using light allow us to see things more clearly.

As the scripture from Genesis states, God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Biblically speaking, light can be a symbol of holiness, goodness, knowledge and hope of God's revelation, whereas the darkness can be associated with sin, evil and despair. This Christmas while we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us be reminded of the light in our lives. *John 12:46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for always being a light in the dark places of the world and the dark places of our lives. Our hope is in God, for you are the light of the world and you call us to be lights for others. May your love shine in us and in all the world. Amen.

~ The Tacketts

December 7

John 1:1-5

This Gospel presents Jesus as the eternal Word of God, who existed even before the world began. The Word, Jesus, was with God as was the same as God and not one thing was made without him. (Jesus was there from the beginning!). The Word was a source of light for a dark world. This Word became a human being and lived among God's creation and became a light, filled with God's grace and truth. Jesus was and is a reflection of who God is, and in Matthew 5:14, we are asked to also be a light unto the world. "You are like light for the whole world. Your light must shine before people reflecting God's love, forgiveness, and truth so that they will see God's glory and give him praise."

In this holiday season and always, let us be a reflection of God's love, forgiveness, and truth. Let us practice "empathy" and not "apathy." Let us show acceptance to our brothers and sisters, no matter their race, religion, or whatever else separates us. We are all God's children, beautifully and wonderfully made by Him. So, in a world of hate and intolerance, where we can say anything, post whatever we feel on Facebook or Twitter, let us emulate Jesus and be a light in the darkness. Go into the darkness and "Let your light shine!" so that they see God reflected in you.

Peace, Love, and Grace.

Prayer: May our hearts be filled with your love that your light might shine through our lives. Amen.

~ Connie Powell

Chocolate Pretzel Christmas Tree
The Tacketts

Ingredients

16 oz package of pretzel sticks
12 oz package of Wilton green candy melts
Wilton star sprinkles
Wilton multi-colored sprinkles
1-2 small sandwich baggy
Wax or parchment paper

Directions

1. Line a large baking sheet with parchment or wax paper.
2. Pour the green candy melts into a microwave safe dish.
3. Heat in the microwave in 30 second increments, stirring until melted.
4. Remove from the oven and let cool for a few minutes.
5. Line several pretzels up on the baking sheet a few inches apart.
6. Scoop the melted chocolate into a sandwich baggy. Snip a corner and gently squeeze the chocolate from the sandwich baggy onto the middle to top part of the pretzel going back and forth to make a 'tree'.
7. Place a star on top of the tree and add multi-colored sprinkles.
8. Repeat this process until you have your desired amount of Christmas trees.
9. Allow chocolate pretzel Christmas trees to sit for a few hours or until hardened.
10. Transfer to a platter and enjoy or top a coconut icing cupcake!

December 9

Luke 1:77-79

“You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give us light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and guide us to the path of peace.”

This is the prophecy and the word of God spoken through Zechariah, a priest in the temple and father of John the Baptist. Zechariah, along with his wife Elizabeth were “very old” at the time the angel of the Lord appeared to them saying they would have a son. Not only would they have a son but “he would be a great man in the Lord’s sight. From his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit” and “go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah” and prepare the way for Jesus.

Initially Zechariah doubted the angel’s message and because of his doubt he was unable to speak until after John was born. After John’s birth he was filled with the Holy Spirit and God’s message was spoken through him.

Salvation is possible only with forgiveness. God cannot forgive our sins on the grounds of justice, so he does it through his “tender mercy.” He delays to condemn us in our guilt but looks to see how he can turn away his wrath and restore us to his favor.

“Mine is the sunlight, Mine is the morning”

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the sunrise each day. Help us to find renewal in each morning’s light and to comprehend the joy of Your light through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

~ Betsy Shepherd

December 10

Ephesians 5:8-14

Ephesians is one of my favorite books of the Bible, due in part to having read books by the late Eugene Peterson, author of the award-winning contemporary-language *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Also, Ephesians is an upbeat letter, Paul's most positive of all.

Ephesians is one of the most complete statements in the New Testament of the significance of the Christian life. It was written to the churches of Asia Minor, but WE can interpret this epistle as a reminder that Jesus is the source of *[our] salvation* and the heart of Christianity's good news. It will cause us to live differently!!

“⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says “*Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*” Ephesians 5: 8-14

Children of light is a metaphor common in the New Testament. Some examples:

“a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” Luke 2:32

“For all who do evil hate the *light* and do not come to the *light*, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the *light*, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” John 3: 20 & 21

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “***I am the light of the world.*** Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the *light of life.*” John 8:12

“For it is the God who said, “*Let light shine out of darkness,*” who has shone in our hearts to give the *light* of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Cor 4:6

“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its *light*, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its *light*, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” Rev 21: 23 & 24

Prayer: Father God, during this blessed season of Advent, help me to rest on your promises. Help me to share the advent light of God's grace to all. Amen

“*Brightly does your manger shine, Glorious is its light divine. Let not sin o'er-cloud this light Ever be our faith thus bright.*” Saint Ambrose of Milan, 4th century

~ Gayle Tolley

December 11

John 12:36

John 12:36

While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light.

In this verse of John 12, Jesus is preaching to a crowd in Jerusalem about his upcoming death. He is essentially telling the people not to delay or the light will be gone. These were the last words Jesus preached in a public setting prior to his arrest. Jesus' warning to mankind was that at some point it will be too late. While you have the light, believe in Christ; his strength, salvation and grace.

Every day we have the opportunity to be a light in someone's life. Act on those moments and point them to Jesus. All God asks is that we tell people our own story, bear witness to the difference God has made in our lives, offer the invitation for people to come and see for themselves, and let God do the rest. Let your light radiate to others and illuminate their paths! We are people of hope because we belong to Jesus. Let's reflect that hope to those around us as we shine our light and radiate the message that we are a child of God!

As we experience the Advent season, I am sure each of you remember singing "This Little Light of Mine" during your childhood and beyond. Let this song be an earworm that puts a smile on your face today and everyday. Believe in the light and know that you are a child of God.

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, yes I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!"

Jesus is the light of the world and those who follow him will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life! Rejoice and be glad in it.

Prayer: O heavenly Light, help us as we share the Advent light of God's grace and good news, to illuminate the lives of all who become children of the Light. AMEN

~ Cheryl Dameron

Advent Candle Lighting – The Candle of Joy

This Sunday's Advent wreath candle lighting varies because it is Gaudette (= "rejoice!") Sunday. As a break from the heaviness of Advent's penitential preparations, this Sunday offers a reprise from our dark longings to offer joy's glimmer of light. The Latin word Gaudette is grammatically imperative, reminding us that even in the midst of darkness, we are called to rejoice. This is also why we light a pink candle—the color of joy in the penitential season of blue/purple. Only the Christ candle is white, also a color signifying joy in many cultures, because the fullness of joy is in the Lord.

We light this candle in hope. *Light the first candle.*

We light this candle for peace. *Light the second candle.*

We light this candle in joy! *Light the third (pink) candle.*

To those who live as exiles from home in a dark time, to those enslaved as exiles due to others' oppression, to those who are sin's exiles from their best God-promised selves, the Lord speaks the joy of good news.

A reading from Zephaniah 3:14-20.

Reader 1:
Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away the
judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the LORD, is in
your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
On that day it shall be said to
Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The LORD, your God, is in your
midst, a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud
singing as on a day of festival.

Reader 2:
"I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for
it. I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.

And I will save the lame and gather
the outcast, and I will change their
shame into praise and renown in all
the earth.

At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and
praised among all the peoples of the
earth, when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes," says the LORD.

Let us pray: *(from Isaiah 12:2-4, Philippians 4:4)*
Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust and not be afraid,
for the LORD is my strength and my might;
God has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
And you will say in that day:
Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I say, Rejoice!
Sing praises to the LORD, for God has done gloriously!

Let us sing:
*O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*



December 13

Psalm 122:1-9

When I think of peace I think of calm, slow-going rivers. Not one that is rapid and rushing over rocks. I also think about people coming together after a difficult situation.

Praising the Lord can bring people together. When we are at church, it is a peaceful place to be together and connect with the Lord. I feel much closer to God when we go to church. We set aside one day a week to worship God, our Lord. God is with us all the time but we don't always acknowledge it. During silent prayer it is a relaxing time to think of Jesus and talk to him in our minds. Time to think about the amazing things that he's done for us.

At Christmas, I think about our nativity set. Baby Jesus peacefully resting. I think about the shepherds and the wiseman coming to visit the tiny baby Jesus. I think of it as a night put aside to honor Jesus. A peaceful time, because everyone knows that baby Jesus has arrived.

Prayer : Dear Heavenly Father, please help us to be kind to one another and not make places unpeaceful where we should be peaceful, connected and close to you. Amen.

~ Emma Braford

December 14

Psalm 130:1-8

“You darkness, that I come from,
I love you more than all the fires
that fence in the world,
for the fire makes
a circle of light for everyone,
and then no one outside learns of you.

But the darkness pulls in everything:
shapes and fires, animals and myself,
how easily it gathers them! -
powers and people -

and it is possible a great energy
is moving near me.

I have faith in nights.”

- Rainer Maria Rilke

With so much beautiful light imagery in our scripture, it is understandable if we do not immediately think of darkness as holy or wonderful. In the dark, we might imagine scary things like monsters but we do not have to limit our imaginings to things that frighten us. After all it was when darkness covered the face of the deep that God’s imagination sparked and creation came into being. The great imaginative energy of God can be found in the dark, in the night, moving toward us.

The Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke helps us perceive that within the dark our own imaginations can play. I like to imagine that the psalmist knows this great energy moving toward them in the night. In this Psalm, we read how the psalmist has a great hope, even more than those that watch for the morning. What is hope if not holy imagination at play helping us to see and believe in the possibilities of better days ahead?

Prayer: As we watch for the morning, O Lord, may we perceive the beauty of the night. May our hearts be filled with imaginative hope and creative wonder. Amen.

~ Amy Fetterman

December 15

Recipe

Caramel Corn
Carol Tolley

Fun to make and fun to eat!

USE a LARGE POT on stovetop:

Combine:

1 Cup butter

2 Cups light brown sugar

1/2 Cup white corn syrup

1/4 Cups molasses

1 teaspoon salt

Boil together for 5 minutes, stirring constantly

MIXTURE IS HOT

Add:

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

The mixture will start to grow and grow at this stage

Mix well

QUICKLY Add:

20 Cups popped corn + 1 Cup peanuts (if you enjoy peanuts)

Pour mixture onto 1 or 2 large baking sheets.

Bake for 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes

Pour out on another baking sheet and allow to cool, breaking apart as it does so.

Note: This was one of my kids favorite 'together' ideas as they loved popping the corn (in those days we used a hot air popper.) And when you add the soda, you get a volcano of bubbly goo! This really was a favorite for my kids. Everyone stepped back when it started growing, laughing at what was happening!

Remind everyone that the mixture is hot!

December 16

Psalm 31:21-24

Psalm 31:21-24 (NIV)

²¹ Praise be to the LORD, for he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege. ²² In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help. ²³ Love the LORD, all his faithful people! The LORD preserves those who are true to him, but the proud he pays back in full. ²⁴ Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Josee-

Christ helps me know what to do and make good choices. When I get scared, I know he is there to protect me all the time. I want to help my friends know Christ through doing the right things.

Harley-

Christ has shown his love for me through helping me at school. He helps me love others. I will give back to others by treating others kindly.

Shasta-

The holidays/life, brings about a lot of stress, worry, and uncertainty. This passage is another reminder that we are not going through our storms alone. Jesus hears us in our despair. Just when we are in the midst of the dark, he shows up with his wonderous works and drives us to the light. I am constantly reminding myself and the girls that no matter what situation we are in, "to be the good." Always do good, say good things, make good choices. He will bless you with all the courage you need.

Dustin-

While reading each of these verses for the 1st time in a while, I feel as though I can relate to these verses as I have lived thru each of these. Working in cities under siege, seeing people destroying their own homes and cities by acts of violence, theft, rioting. Seeing people who were cut off from his sight coming for bad acts to fight against anyone who is there ready to defend their homes, their businesses. Then those who have come to siege, turn away at the last second, but not without seeing those few with their heads bowed, praying for all to stop. Then those who are able to keep their faith, see the restoration where the Lord preserves those who have bowed their heads in cry for help. By living and seeing sieges, I have also seen the wonders of his love, and they are truly great to have witnessed. My take-away is as you have read, always keep your faith in the Lord and he will always preserve those who are true to him.

Prayer: Thank you for all you do for us, Lord. Amen.

~ The Armentrout Family

December 17

Psalm 80

Psalm 80 is a lament, and a hope. We know the fulfillment of that hope. As the PW women recognize from this year's Bible study, a lament is an honest conversation with God. We tell Him what is bothering us (often of our own doing), ask Him to fix it, and show our faith in His answer.

The Problem: The people of Israel were in trouble. God had brought them out of bondage in Egypt and given them a new land but other religions looked like more fun so they neglected their covenant with Him and were being destroyed.

You know God's Answer.

In this Psalm God is called "Shepherd of Israel." In John 10:11 we see "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Psalm 80 speaks of the vine transplanted from Egypt. John 15:1 says "I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener." In multiple scriptures of the New Testament Jesus is referred to as "the son of man." Verse 17 of this Psalm requests His coming and makes a promise in verse 18. Whether or not we try to keep that promise is up to us.

The repeated refrain of this Psalm requests a way to become God's people again and reminds us of the blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26.

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Prayer: Good Shepherd, during this time of Advent may we keep our focus on You. We thank you for giving us opportunity to be your children, the sheep guided by you. Amen

~ Lea Braford

Psalm 72 speaks of a higher power and the dependence of the king on this power to govern. This Psalm sets out a goal of how things should be and compares it with how things are in the present. It recognizes God's power to make things right. Psalm 72 identifies the presence of evil and the plight of the poor at the hands of the oppressors as being at the root of Israel's problems. Scholars have not viewed Psalm 72 (A Song of Solomon) as prophecy. However, when compared to messianic prophecy, there are similarities. Psalm 72 seems to set out an ideal that only God's design can eventually fulfil. Solomon is famous as the ultimate example of what a king should be... wise and fair with a long term consideration for future generations. Solomon was very much aware of his limitations and the power of Yahweh. Yet, other kings, throughout history, have failed to measure up to Solomon's standards.

In my job as a forester, I used aerial photographs for mapping forests and fields. The earliest set of aerals, that I used, was flown in 1939! I was able to pinpoint an agricultural field reverting to young pine trees in one of these 1939 photos and know that the trees were 40 years old at the time of a 1979 aerial photograph. By expanding this historical concept, we can study the Old Testament, and follow prophecy through to the New Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus points us to the fulfilment of many prophecies from the Old Testament. Looking back to Solomon's time we can derive hope that God's plan will continue to evolve as we compare it to when Jesus was with us on earth. In a way, there is similarity to generations of trees reproducing and changing over time and people and their relationships.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You provide access for us to your power, your wisdom, and your love. Help us as we struggle to tap into and apply these gifts in a world that is also struggling. Amen

~ Bill Braford

December 19

Sunday

Advent Candle Lighting – The Candle of Love

We light this candle in hope. *Light the first candle.*

We light this candle for peace. *Light the second candle.*

We light this candle in joy! *Light the third candle.*

We light this candle with love. *Light the fourth candle.*

Hear again the Word of the Lord drawn from Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God . . . will rejoice over you with gladness; God will quiet you with divine love like a child upon the breast. The Lord will exult over you with loud singing.

Let us pray:

God of hope, God of peace,

God of joy, and God of love,

Teach us how to love one another
as reflections of your light in the world.

God of promise, God of love,

into our darkness come.

Let us sing:

O come, thou Key of David, come

And open wide our heav'nly home;

Make safe the way that leads on high,

And close the path to misery.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel



4TH SUNDAY OF *Advent*

December 20

John 1:19-27

The Jewish authorities sent some priests and Levites to John to ask him "Who are you?" John did not refuse to answer, but spoke openly and clearly, saying "I am not the Messiah." "Who are you then?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?" "No, I am not," John answered. "Are you the Prophet?" they asked. "No," he replied. "Then tell us who you are," they said. We have to take an answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "I am 'the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!'" The messengers, who had been sent by the Pharisees, then asked John, "If you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?" John answered, "I baptize with water, but among you stands the one you do not know. He is coming after me, but I am not good enough to untie his sandals." (from the Message)

John the Baptist, predestined by God to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He was to prepare the people for the arrival of God's son. He didn't look the part (prophet or priest?) His dress (camel hair) and food (locust and honey) choices set him apart. And his sermons were filled with fire and brimstone. He certainly didn't fit in with what the masses were used to. Totally different from the pious Pharisees! This man was certainly different.

And yet, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and had the faith of Elijah. The ordinary saw and believed and were baptized. Wow! Here was a man who knew who he was and wasn't. And he knew his Lord, because he was in relationship with Him.

How about us? Who are we?

High Bridge Church was given a double 'whammy' last year: We were faced with a pandemic and we lost our dear Spiritual leader. We, like the Jewish people, cried out to God. And He answered our prayers! And so we learned a new song and danced to a different rhythm with a new Spiritual Leader. Different? I'll say so! A woman, who is different, who like John, is filled with the Holy Spirit and faith of Elijah. A woman who knows who she is and who God is.

And so I ask, "Who are you?"

"Me?, I am a child of the living Lord, open to His words of hope, living for Him."

This year, spend time in relationship with Emmanuel, God with us, and find out who you are and what plans He has for you.

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit and fill me once more, so that I know who I am and who you are. Amen.

~ Carol Tolley

December 21

Luke 1:26-38

Anytime I read or hear this passage read, it reminds me of a Christmas twenty-some years ago. It was an outdoor pageant at my home church in Toms Brook. I was honored to play the part of Gabriel. My non-speaking role was to stand on a small shed, dressed in a white robe (sheet) with wings and a halo. As this scripture was read to those passing by, a light would shine on me. Now this was a very cold and blustery night, and good thing I didn't have to speak as I was half frozen and my wings were flapping all over the place. I must have been a sight as my two best supporters (?) in the world, my wife and son, can attest to. Alas....

There is so much in these few verses - the appearance of the angel, the news the angel brings, Mary's reaction. I've always been so impressed by Mary. Here she was a young girl in just her teens and engaged to be married soon. This angel appears and tells her that "she's highly favored." I imagine Mary is startled as most of us would be. And she's "greatly troubled" by what the angel told her. But Gabriel says very calmly what all angels say when they appear throughout the Bible, "Do not be afraid." Mary doesn't run away but stays and hears Gabriel out.

Gabriel then tells her that she's going to be a mother, and not only that, but he'll be "called the Son of the Most High." I'm sure Mary was confused and didn't understand, but she still doesn't run away. She simply asks, "How will this be?" When Gabriel tells her it is by the Holy Spirit, Mary just accepts this and says, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." Wow! What a testament of faith. Mary certainly believed that "nothing is impossible with God." And it's not.

There's a quote from Oswald Chambers devotional, *My Utmost For His Highest*, that exemplifies just how Mary responded. It says, "The life of faith says, 'Lord, you have said it, it appears to be irrational, but I'm going to step out boldly, trusting in your Word.'"

Prayer: Heavenly Father. May we strive to be as strong in our faith as Mary was. Help us to keep our eyes on the Son and know in our hearts that nothing is impossible with God. Amen

~ Lynn McCoy

December 22

Recipe

Cranberry Christmas Cake

Lorna J. Whisler

Ingredients:

3 eggs
2 cups sugar
3/4 cup butter, softened
1 tsp vanilla
2 cups all-purpose flour
12 oz. fresh cranberries

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

With a mixer, beat the eggs with the sugar until slightly thickened and light in color, about 5-7 minutes. The mixture should almost double in size. The eggs work as your leavening agent in this recipe, so do not skip this step. The mixture should form a ribbon when you lift the beaters out of the bowl.

Add the butter and vanilla; mix for two more minutes.

Stir in the flour until just combined. Add the cranberries and stir to mix throughout.

Spread in a buttered 9x13 pan.

Bake for 40-50 minutes, or until very lightly browned and a toothpick inserted near the center of the cake comes out clean.

Let cool completely before cutting not small pieces. Can be fairly small pieces, about 1"x2", so that they could be easily eaten at a party.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

December 23

Matthew 1:18-23

This passage of scripture tells us how the birth of Jesus came about. A story we have heard many times. There is the saying: “familiarity breeds disinterest.” In this case, familiarity with this Gospel may cause us to only hear the words and not take time to listen intently to the message of the Gospel.

Take a moment and put yourself in Mary’s and Joseph’s places. Try to imagine Mary’s thoughts and emotions as she listened to what the angel had told her. What would she say to her parents? And Joseph? The tale she had to tell was unbelievable!

How did Joseph initially react when Mary told him she was pregnant (by the Holy Spirit)? What did he think of Mary? Did he naturally think that she had been unfaithful to him? Was he shocked, angry, disbelieving? What was he to do? Being a righteous man he did not want to disgrace her, so he made plans to send her away secretly.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Did Joseph think he was losing his mind? Being human, Joseph had to have been overwhelmed and confused by all these strange happenings. Yet despite the fantastic and unbelievable circumstances, Joseph had faith. He had faith and trust in God and in Mary. Joseph truly was a man of God.

How do we react when we are confronted with circumstances (like this COVID threat for almost two years now) that throw us off balance, confound or frighten us? Do we continue to trust in God? Or do we walk away from God angry or despairing? Regardless of how we react, our “God who is with us” never leaves our side. Our loving God is with us every moment (even when we don’t “feel” God’s presence). Just as God was with Joseph and Mary in that strange, difficult and confusing time long ago, God also walks us now, today. And God graces and gifts us with the strength we need! The question is will we continue to believe and trust in our loving God? I believe we will!

Prayer: Dear Lord, continue to keep us ballasted as we travel along our journeys on rough waterways. Amen.

~ Lorna J. Whisler

Christ Candle Lighting

We have watched; we have waited in hope. *Light the first candle.*
...for peace. *Light the second candle.*
...in joy! *Light the third candle.*
...with love. *Light the fourth candle is lit.*

Now our redemption draws near!
The Christ candle (the center white candle) is lit.

Hear the Word of the Lord from Isaiah 9:2-7:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep
darkness —
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing
plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of
Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping
warriors and all the garments rolled in
blood shall be burned as fuel for the
fire.

For a child has been born for us,
a son is given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his
kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and
forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will
do this.
Glory to God in the highest!
Alleluia! Amen!

Let us sing:
Joy to the world! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing

December 25

Christmas Day

Our God is the One who comes to us
in a burning bush,
in an angel's song,
in a newborn child.

Our God is the One who cannot be found
locked in the church,
not even in the sanctuary.

Our God will be where God will be
with no constraints,
no predictability.

Our God where our God lives,
and destruction has no power
and even death cannot stop
the living.

Our God will be born where God will be born,
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.

When God is ready
God will come
even to a godforsaken place
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch...
for you know not when
God comes.

Watch, that you might be found
whenever
wherever
God comes.

- Ann Weems

Merry Christmas!