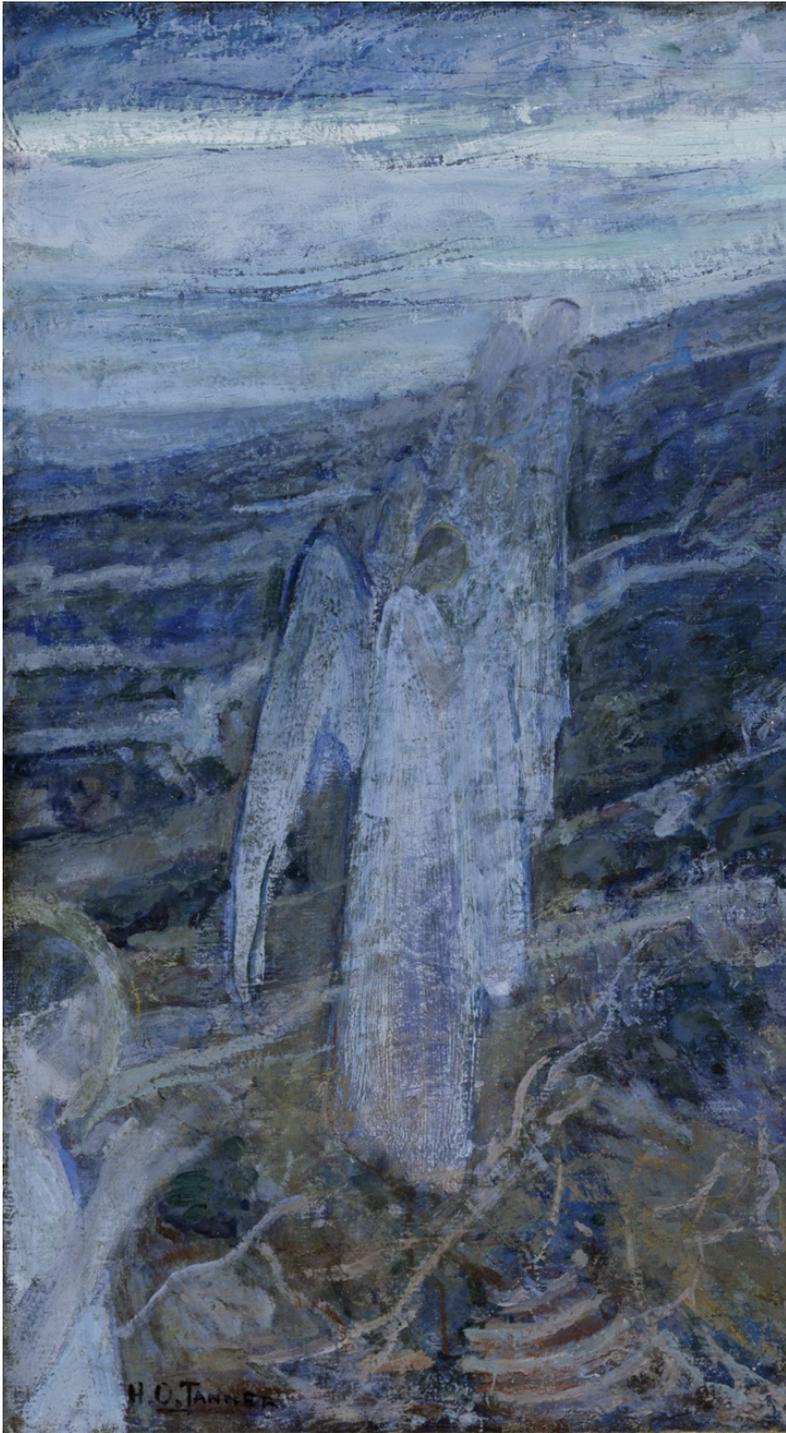




Advent 2024: A GREAT LIGHT

A devotional for individuals, groups, & families

West End Presbyterian Church



The celebration of the season of Advent, beginning four Sundays before Christmas day, dates back to the 4th century AD. It's a time that focuses our attention on Christ's first coming as well as His second coming when He will return to redeem His creation and rule with all power and authority. We are to be reminded that we do not know the day or the hour of Christ's return, and we are filled with both a sense of joyful expectation and humble reverence, with our spiritual focus being on lives of prayer and preparation. The church has used the season of Advent (which means "coming" or "arrival") to focus and reflect on the particular themes of the final judgment of the world, John the Baptist's preparation for the ministry of Christ, and the annunciation to Mary that she would be the mother of the Savior of the world.

This booklet is intended as a guide for devotional reading for individuals and groups or family worship during the Advent season. For each week of Advent, there are Scripture readings, prayers of confession, hymns, memory verses, a craft for the family, and reflections on God made Man.

For this year, the reflections will walk through the first seven verses of Isaiah 9, drawing our eyes to Jesus, who pierced our darkness. Our great Light. Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. May you be amazed at the grace of our God who is with us and will come again.

Angels Appearing Before the Shepherds, Henry Ossawa Tanner (c.1910)

Compiled by Becca Wethered

*All Scripture passages from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version.
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Week of December 1st A GREAT LIGHT

READ: Isaiah 9:1-2

⁹1But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."

REFLECT

"As our Lord Jesus tells us, unless we see the light of God clearly, what we call light is actually darkness: 'how great is that darkness!' (Matt. 6:23). Advent bids us take a fearless inventory of the darkness: the darkness without and the darkness within."

--Fleming Rutledge

For Children: In these verses, Isaiah prophesies of a future where the people who walk in darkness - who are sad, broken, sin, and need help - will see a great light that shines on them...that Great Light is fulfilled in Jesus! In John 8:12, Jesus says *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Light helps us see clearly, gives warmth, and can help us when we are afraid or lost in the dark. What an encouraging promise: because Jesus is with us always, we have the Light of the World to shine in the darkness, and the darkness (*our sins, our sadness, bad things that happen to us*) will never win!

- **Questions:** Have you ever been afraid of the dark? What made the fear go away? How does God care for His people in these verses? What does that tell you about His heart?

For All of us: In Scripture, light stands for God's blessings, presence, and revelation (see Isaiah [9:2](#), [30:26](#), [42:6 & 16](#), and [60:1-3](#)). We often take for granted how easily we can access light in our modern age, but these original hearers would have fully experienced how much light was a source of life (*providing warmth from a fire, guiding the way when you are lost*). The darkness mentioned in verse 2 is a spiritual darkness - the people were in anguish because of their sinful ways and because of the reality of living in a world that is broken. The promise of a great light being shone on them (*and on us!*) means that the darkness in us (*struggles with anger, shame, fear, unbelief*) and the darkness around us (*suffering without relief, brokenness in relationships, injustice towards the poor and oppressed*) will never overcome. Praise the Light of the World who stepped down into darkness so we can see!

- **Questions:** How does remembering Jesus as our Light give you hope? How does knowing He is our Guide show His mercy and faithfulness to you?

PRACTICE

This coming week...

- Consider a 'work of darkness' that you are tempted to hold onto this week (fear, shame, anger, unbelief, etc.) Why is it more appealing than the light? **What is it like to ask Jesus to cast off the darkness and shine His light on your heart?**
- Recall a moment or season that felt dark (maybe you are in one now). **How did Jesus meet you with His light?** Did He provide a way out? A friend to walk alongside you? A word of comfort? Share with someone about that experience this week.

PRAY

Lord of hope,
as night workers long for the sunrise,
we long for the coming of Christ.
We yearn for Your Spirit to give us a glimpse of Your glory,
that one day we will see in full,
when all will be made new,
through Christ, our Lord, our light. Amen.

MEMORIZE

"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*

ENGAGE: Advent Wreath

Supplies Needed:

- Evergreen trimmings or strand of evergreen roping (real or artificial)
- 12"-16" diameter foam wreath
- Greening pins
- Three 10" taper candles (purple)
- One 10" taper candle (pink)
- One pillar candle (white)

Instructions for making the wreath:

Lay the foam ring on a protected work surface. Carve out or drill four shallow holes into the foam for the candles. Use greening pins to pin evergreen trimmings into the foam until the wreath is to your desired fullness. (If using roping, wrap rope around the wreath until covered to your liking using greening pins to hold it in place as needed.) Insert the four candles into the foam wreath and use the greenery to help stabilize the candles (put the white pillar candle in the middle).

Instructions for lighting the wreath:

Light one purple candle on the first Sunday of Advent, then light another purple candle alongside the first on the second Sunday, followed by a pink candle on the third Sunday, the last purple candle on the fourth Sunday, and then the white candle on Christmas Eve.

SING: Veiled in Darkness Judah Lay



1. Veiled in dark - ness Ju - dah lay, wait - ing for the
2. Still the earth in dark - ness lies. Up from death's dark
3. Light of light, we hum - bly pray, shine u - pon Thy



prom - ised day, while a - cross the sha - dow - y night
vale a - rise voi - ces of a world in grief,
world to - day; break the gloom of our dark night,



streamed a flood of glo - rious light, heav'n - ly voi - ces chant - ting then,
prayers of men who seek re - lief: "Now our dark - ness pierce a - gain,
fill our souls with love and light, send Thy bles - sed Word a - gain,



"Peace on earth, good will to men." "Peace on earth, good will to__ men."
peace on earth, good will to men." "Peace on earth, good will to__ men."
"Peace on earth, good will to men." "Peace on earth, good will to__ men."



Week of December 8th INCREASED JOY

READ: Isaiah 9:3-5

³You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. ⁴For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire."

REFLECT

*"Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices."
--Placide Cappeau*

For Children: Remember that in Isaiah 9:1, there was gloom and anguish (darkness and sadness) all around, but now we see that not only has God's light shone on the people, but they will have joy! When they were in darkness, the people walked around with heavy burdens, like something pushing you down all the time, but here God promises He will break that burden, that weight. God promises to lift our burdens through His Son, Jesus, who took the burden of our sin to the cross. He not only bore that heavy weight for us, but He promises joy in its place. During the season of Advent, we look forward to when Jesus will come again, because we still are weighed down by brokenness in us and around us – but we can have joyful hope for when Jesus comes and takes away our burdens forever!

- **Questions:** What is something that makes you really happy? Why?
When something weighs you down (*fighting with your family, trouble at school, sickness or pain*), what is God's promise for you in these verses?

For All of us: In this prophecy, the people will have a new future of increased joy, instead of gloom and anguish. This is great news for them, because they had been living years of terrible oppression under the Assyrian empire (*Zebulun and Naphtali in Isaiah 9:1 were some of the first regions to suffer under Assyrian invasion*). They knew exactly what the yoke and rod of the oppressor felt like. So, joy is expressed in the form of harvest (*abundant food and flourishing!*) and victory in battle – God will bring an end to injustice and war. While our burdens may look different than what the Israelites experienced, we still live in a world weighed down by the sin in our hearts, injustice, and brokenness. Praise God that Jesus took our burdens (*past, present, and future*) upon Himself, and replaced them with His easy and light yoke ([Matthew 11:28-30](#)) - this is where our hope lies!

- **Questions:** What is a way you have felt burdened or weighed down this week?
What do these verses show us about the heart of God?

PRACTICE

This coming week...

- Notice moments you feel burdened this week. **What is weighing you down?** (*Conflict in relationship, anxiety, habitual sin, unmet longings, etc.*) **Confess your burdens to Jesus** and ask for grace to receive His rest and joy.
- Think of a time in your life where Jesus lifted a burden. What did it feel like? **How might remembering His faithfulness to you help you to lift up your head today?**

PRAY

based on Psalm 126

If our lives are dry and parched, Lord, send the living waters of Your Spirit to revive us, to enliven us, to bring forth new life. Immanuel, come quickly.

If our times are empty and barren, Lord, grant us a rich harvest, send us home with sheaves of blessing, fill us with Your abundance, and teach us to share the harvest with others. Immanuel, come quickly.

If our bodies are weary and heavy laden, Lord, fill us with laughter; give us shouts of joy; envelop us with Your gladness. Immanuel, come quickly.

MEMORIZE

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

--*Matthew 11:28-30*

"The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

--*Isaiah 29:19*

ENGAGE: Star Ornament Making

Draw and cut out star patterns on simple white paper. On one side, write out prayer requests from your family, your community, or around the world (*hint: what are some burdens you see around you?*) On the other side, write out a Bible verse that speaks to each request. Then hang them around your living room or on your Christmas tree, pausing to pray as you tape each one up, and continuing to pray each week during Advent.

**Remember to light the 2nd candle of your Advent wreath, along with the first candle from last Sunday.*

SING: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

1 Come, thou long-expect-ed Je-sus, born to set thy peo-ple free;
2 Born thy peo-ple to de-li-ver, born a child and yet a king,

The first system of music features a treble and bass staff in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

from our fears and sins re-lease us; let us find our rest in thee.
born to reign in us for-e-ver, now thy gra-cious king-dom bring.

The second system continues the melody and bass line from the first system. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Is-rael's strength and con-so-la-tion, hope of all the earth thou art;
By thine own e-ter-nal Spi-rit rule in all our hearts a-lone;

The third system continues the melody and bass line. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

dear De-sire of ev-ery na-tion, Joy of ev-ery long-ing heart.
by thine all-suf-fi-cient me-rit raise us to thy glo-rious throne.

The fourth system concludes the piece with a double bar line. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.



Week of December 15th FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN

READ: Isaiah 9:6

"⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

REFLECT

*"In our world too, a Stable once had something in it that was bigger than our whole world."
--C.S. Lewis*

For Children: Throughout the book of Isaiah, God promises that He will send an Immanuel, which means "God with us" to His people. These verses tell us about who this Immanuel is, and about His heart. We've learned He will bring light, life, joy, freedom, and peace – and now we learn He, Himself, will be given to us! He will be our Wonderful Counselor (*someone who helps and guides us*), Mighty God (*someone who is powerful*), Everlasting Father (*a father who loves us forever*), and our Prince of Peace (*someone who calms us when we are afraid*). What a gift we have because we are His and He is ours.

- **Questions:** What are some of the names of God in these verses?
Since we know these many names of our Immanuel, God with us, what can we praise Him for during this season of Advent?

For All of us: In the darkness, a light shines. A child is born, given to us, and we can have hope. These descriptions of our Savior, our God with us, speak both to His deity and His humanity. As a human child, He knows fully what weakness and need are. He knows what it is to be a son, and have a father. As God, He is the perfect Helper and Guide (hence His name as Light). He is all-powerful, driving out the darkness as no ordinary human can. As God the Father, His love for us will never end – it takes your breath away when you sit with that! And as Prince of Peace, He has dominion, power to give peace that passes understanding (see [Philippians 4:7](#)). God knew exactly what the people were longing for in the darkness, and in His tender love, He gave His Son.

- **Questions:** Which of these descriptions of Immanuel, God with us, most encourage you?
Why? Are any of these aspects of Jesus' character hard to trust right now?

PRACTICE

This coming week...

- Consider the names of Jesus, our Immanuel, this week. Where in your life (*relationships, health concerns, job, etc.*) do you need to be reminded that **Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace?** Share with a family member or friend.
- Take a risk to **share the good news of who Jesus is and what He has done with someone this week.** What did it feel like to share this message?

PRAY

Covenant God,
You heard Your people yearning for a Savior.
Thank You for sending Your Son so long ago.
We now rehearse Your promise
that Christ will come again,
that death and suffering will end
and every tear will be wiped away.
Come, Lord Jesus, come.
As You fulfilled Israel's hopes long ago,
so we long for all these promises to be fulfilled. Amen.

MEMORIZE

"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

--*Isaiah 7:14*

ENGAGE: Coloring Page

Visit the [Advent & Christmas page](#) on our website (wepc.org) to print out and color a picture with the name of our Savior.

**Remember to light the 3rd candle of your Advent wreath, along with the 2 other candles from the past 2 Sundays.*

SING: O Come, All Ye Faithful

1 O come, all ye faith - ful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant! O
2 God of _____ God, _____ Light of Light e - ter - nal
3 Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion,
4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this hap - py morn - ing;

come ye, O come ye to Beth - le - hem!
lo, he ab - hors not the vir - gin's womb;
sing, all ye bright hosts of heaven a - bove;
Je - sus to thee be all glo - ry given;

Come and be - hold him born the King of an - gels;
Son of the Fa - ther, be - got - ten not cre - at - ed;
"Glo - ry to God, all glo - ry in the high - est!"
Word of the Fa - ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing



Week of December 22nd PEACE, JUSTICE, & RIGHTEOUSNESS

READ: Isaiah 9:7

"Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

REFLECT

"Those infant hands shall burst our bands, and work out our salvation; Strangle the crooked serpent, destroy his works forever, and open set the heavenly gate to every true believer."
--John Wesley, 18th century

For Children: During Advent, we remember Jesus' first coming to save us and set us free from darkness, and we look forward to when He will come again and destroy the darkness of sin once and for all. When we look around us, it's easy to see that we don't always have peace (*in our family, at school, when bad things happen in the world, and even in our hearts*). God is so angry at sin (*one way to understand the word 'zeal' in verse 7*), and He loves us so much, that He will send His Son again to bring peace and justice forever. That is what we wait and hope for every Advent season.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

- **Questions:** How would you describe a king?
What does this verse say the Immanuel's Kingdom will be like? What are you excited about the coming Kingdom?

For All of us: This passage describes the kingdom (government) of Immanuel as one of never-ending peace, descended from the man after God's own heart. His kingdom is upheld with justice (*defending the cause of orphans and widows, loving the stranger, giving food & clothing to the needy – see [Deuteronomy 10:18-19](#)*). It is a kingdom upheld also with righteousness, which can be understood as living in right relationship with God, other people, and creation. In our current times, it is hard to imagine a government of all people acting in this way. Praise God that His kingdom is everlasting, and that even when we still see injustice, lack of love, and greediness in our world, His promised fulfilment of the Kingdom is where we truly can put our trust. **Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come!**

- **Questions:** Which of these descriptions of Jesus' kingdom are you most longing for? Why? Where in your life do you need Jesus to come and set things right?

PRACTICE

This coming week...

- Jesus' kingdom is marked by peace, justice, and righteousness. **What is one way you can move towards someone in peace, justice, or righteousness (right-relating) this week?** Repent of the ways you fail to love, and ask Jesus to powerfully move through you. He will meet you with His bountiful grace.
- **Thank God for His perfect kingdom** that provides everlasting peace, all-encompassing justice, and righteousness that comes from His heart.

PRAY

Above the clamor of violence

Your Word of truth resounds,

O God of majesty and power.

Over nations enshrouded in despair Your justice dawns.

Grant Your household a discerning spirit and a watchful eye

to wait for Your second coming.

Hasten the advent of that day when there is justice for the poor,

and peace for the afflicted, our deeds of darkness cast off,

and all Your scattered children gathered into one.

We ask this through Him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near:

Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,

who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,

one God, forever and ever. Amen.

MEMORIZE

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." --*Luke 1:31-33*

ENGAGE: On-the-Go Bags

Collect the following items to put in a gallon size ziploc bag or large lunch sack:

- Water bottle
- 1-2 individual snacks (trail mix, peanut butter crackers, protein bar, etc.)
- Small pack of Kleenex
- A pair of socks
- Travel size toothbrush and toothpaste

Put together some bags and keep them in an easily accessible spot in your car. As you drive around this holiday season, keep an eye out for someone in need and reach out to them in love.

**Remember to light the final purple candle on your Advent wreath, along with the 3 other candles from the past 3 Sundays. Then, on Christmas Eve, light the white candle.*

SING: Come, Behold the Wondrous Mystery

1. Come, be - hold the won-drous mys - tery, in the dawn-ing of the King. He, the
 2. Come, be - hold the won-drous mys - tery, He the per - fect Son of Man. In His
 3. Come, be - hold the won-drous mys - tery, Christ the Lord up - on the tree. In the
 4. Come, be - hold the won-drous mys - tery, slain by death the God of life. But no

theme of heave-en's prais - es, robed in frail hu - man - i - ty. In our
 liv - ing, in His suf - fering, nev - er trace nor stain of sin. See the
 stead of ru - ined sin - ners hangs the Lamb in vic - tor - y. See the
 grave could e'er re - strain Him; praise the Lord; He is a - live! What a

long - ing, in our dark - ness, now the light of life has come! Look to
 true and bet - ter Ad - am, come to save the hell-bound man. Christ the
 price of our re - demp - tion, see the Fa - ther's plan un - fold. Bring-ing
 fore - taste of de - liv - 'rance, how un - wav - er - ing our hope. Christ in

Christ who con - de - scend - ed, took on flesh to ran - som us.
 great and sure ful - fill - ment of the law; in Him we stand.
 man - y sons to glo - ry, grace un - meas - ured, love un - told.
 pow - er res - ur - rect - ed as we will be when He comes.

Advent & Christmas

at West End Presbyterian Church

Advent Worship Service:
Every Longing Heart
12.1.2024 7PM
WEPC Chapel

Neighborhood Caroling
12.5.2024 6PM
WEPC Fellowship Hall

Kids Club Christmas Pageant
12.11.2024 6:30PM
WEPC Sanctuary

Worship on Christmas Eve
12.24.2024
4PM Family Service
7PM Lessons & Carols
WEPC Sanctuary

