



Light came down

2020 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church

"The real Christmas gift,
for which Advent is the process,
is learning to hum hope,
learning to dance the divine."

– Sister Joan Chittister, *A Monastery Almanac*



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Merry Christmas!

The Light of the World

Christmas Eve December 24 & Christmas Day 25



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Why Advent?

Beginning four Sundays before Christmas, Advent is the season in the Church calendar during which we look forward to God's coming. The word *advent* derives from the Latin word for "coming" or "arrival." The early Church used the equivalent word in Greek to refer to Christ's ultimate return to gather His people into eternity.

During Advent we look forward to the birth of Jesus Christ, and we also look forward to Christ's triumphal return. We celebrate God coming to dwell among us in Jesus. We open our hearts to how God wants to come into our lives now. And we anticipate with hope our everlasting life with God.

Though so much of what we think of as "normal life" has been up-ended in 2020, typically Christmastime is a busy season, filled with festive gatherings, decorations, candlelight, holiday food, and gift exchanges—and we pray that you will have delightful, light-filled occasions for celebration even in this unusual year.

Observing the life-giving Advent season in tandem with the oft- hectic Christmas season is not meant to scribble more to-do's on the list but to help us intentionally focus on Christ in Christmas. It maintains our attention on the important above the urgent. It gives us an opportunity to read and consider God's Word with loved ones and, for those with children at home, it creates a seasonal opportunity to train up children in the life of faith.

In this year, perhaps more than most, we have become well-acquainted with waiting. Admittedly, many of us feel fatigued from so much waiting. Our hearts are heavy; our souls sigh. And so this year, perhaps more than most, it has become increasingly important to keep our eyes on Christ—to wait in hope for Him, to bear the expectation of His joy-filled arrival on Christmas, and in our everyday lives, and for our waiting world.





The Advent wreath candle lighting tradition can be a beautifully light-filled celebration of God's coming in which each element is symbolic:

The Wreath (a circle) signifies eternity—God is, was and always will be. The four perimeter candles may be all white, or three purple and one pink; purple represents royalty and repentance; pink represents joy. The center candle (always white) represents Jesus' divine nature. Evergreens represent everlasting life in Jesus and His everlasting love for us.

The candlelight itself symbolizes Jesus, the Light of the World.

Each day as you prepare to light the candles, repeat the words of John 8:12—"Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" Sunday candle lightings include Scripture and a brief reading; Monday through Saturday, a discussion question replaces the reading.

During the first week, light only one candle. The second week light two candles, the third week three candles and the fourth week four candles. Light the center candle on Christmas to signify that Jesus, the Light of the world, has come down.

You may find it helpful to set aside a special time each day to light the Advent candles and to establish either a routine or a rotation for who will light and extinguish the candles, read Scripture, and pray.

For families with young children: Depending on your children's ages, you may use flameless candles, read from a children's Bible, choose the shorter Scripture option, or move straight from reading Scripture to prayer. Even when they don't follow every point, children will benefit from the faith-filled model you present as you engage with God's Word and Christian tradition.

Week 1
The Light of Hope

November 29—December 5

Say aloud together: Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Light the first candle (middle purple candle): We light these candles to celebrate Jesus, who comes into the darkness to shine the light of hope.

Read Scripture: Luke 1:67-80 (Shorter reading: Luke 1:67-70, 76-79)

Read: Praise be to our God, who sent prophets to remind us of His covenant of love, sustain our hope, and prepare the way for our coming Lord who will shine His light in our darkness and guide our feet to the path of peace.

Pray: Most High God, thank you for the gift of people who remind us of your great love. With hope we anticipate the birth of your Son, in whose name we wait and pray, Amen.

MONDAY Genesis 1:3-4 What does it mean to you personally that God has the power to create light out of darkness?

TUESDAY Exodus 3:2-3 When have you seen God’s light appear in surprising places?

WEDNESDAY Exodus 13:21-22 How does God’s light go in front of you?

THURSDAY 1 Kings 18:33-39 What big or small miracles have you witnessed that help you know that the Lord is God?

FRIDAY 2 Chronicles 13:10-11 How might lighting a candle in your home remind you to honor and serve the Lord?

SATURDAY Psalm 19:8 How do God’s commands give light to our eyes? What does that mean for you today?

“The Hope that was born that night continues to radiate down through the years until it envelops your heart and mine.”

–Anne Graham Lotz, *God’s Story*

In France, Christmas is called *Noel* in reference to the good news of the gospel. In Italy, Christmas is called *Il Natale*, meaning “the birthday.”



“STAINED GLASS” VOTIVES

You'll need: clean, label-free clear glass condiment jars; tissue paper in a variety of colors; liquid craft glue (such as Elmer's); foam paint brush; a bowl; votive candles (real or flameless), or battery-operated strings of LED lights, or glow sticks. Optional: craft tape (washi). Note: if you plan to use real candles, make sure your jar is heat-resistant—for example, use a jar intended for canning jam.

Put a small amount of glue in a bowl and slowly add a few drops of water at a time to thin it slightly. Tear the tissue paper into pieces. Use the foam paint brush to coat the jar with glue and add pieces of tissue paper to cover. Keep adding glue and paper until the jar is covered to your liking, and then add another coat of glue over the paper. Set it aside to dry. You might choose to create a design using washi tape instead of tissue paper, or add washi tape in addition after the glue has dried. When your project is completely dry, add your choice of candle, LED light strings, or glow sticks. Use your new votive light to remind you of Christ's light shining in your home.

Week 2
The Light of Life

December 6—12

Say aloud together: Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Light two candles (purple): We light these candles to celebrate Jesus, who comes into the darkness to shine the light of hope and life.

Read Scripture: John 1:1-5

Read: In the beginning, God spoke into the vast emptiness to create life. From His infinite imagination, God spoke into being amoebas and armadillos, light and life and love, mountains and mollusks, rhinos and roses, wombats and waterfalls, and so much more—declaring each “good.” To us—all of us, human beings created in His image—He spoke the blessing “very good.”

Pray: Creator God, thank you for the gift of life on earth and life eternal. In the name of Jesus we wait and pray, Amen.

MONDAY Psalm 27:1 How does the light of the Lord keep you from being afraid?

TUESDAY Psalm 43:3 What help do we receive from light? How does God care for us through His light?

WEDNESDAY Psalm 97:11 When have you experienced feeling light and joy as a result of your decisions to follow Jesus?

THURSDAY Psalm 119:105 How can the Bible make clear your next step?

FRIDAY Psalm 139:11-12 When have you felt like hiding from God? How did He respond?

SATURDAY Proverbs 20:27 Do you tend to trust or doubt your intuition? How might this verse help you receive it as a gift from God?

“God redeems darkness. He wants to infiltrate the shadows the hardest life has to offer and bring light beyond our comprehension.”

–Tsh Oxenreider, *Shadow & Light: a Journey into Advent*

Have you mailed your Christmas cards yet? Englishman John Calcott Horsley popularized the tradition of sending Christmas greetings in the late 1830s when he began producing cards featuring festive scenes and a pre-written holiday sentiment. Newly efficient post offices made the cards a big hit. About the same time, similar cards were being made in New York by R.H. Pease, the first American card maker, and later by Louis Prang, a German immigrant to America.



FINGERPRINT LIGHT STRING CHRISTMAS CARD

You'll need: cardstock; markers; ink pads or tempera paints.

Fold the cardstock in half like a greeting card. Draw a wavy line, like a string of lights you've just untangled. Choose where your "lights" will go on your string and use the marker to draw a small rectangle in those spots, the "plug" for each light. Then press your finger on an ink pad or dip it in paint and add your fingerprint lights to the string. Repeat with multiple colors if desired. This could be a fun project to do with small children as a keepsake or a gift for relatives you won't see this holiday season.

Week 3
The Light of Glory

December 13—19

Say aloud together: Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Light three candles (two purple, one pink): We light these candles to celebrate Jesus, who comes into the darkness to shine the light of hope, life, and glory.

Read Scripture: John 1:6-18 (Shorter reading: John 1:9-14)

Read: The sun rises every day without fail even when clouds block our view of its brilliance. The moon and stars sparkle through each night while we sleep. God dazzles His light on the whole world, and those who open their eyes to see His glory receive a startling new identity-gift: we become His very own beloved children.

Pray: God of glory, illuminate our eyes to read your living Word filled with grace and truth. In the name of Jesus, we wait and pray. Amen.

MONDAY Matthew 17:1-8 What does Jesus want to say to you?

TUESDAY Acts 9:1-5 Has God ever unexpectedly redirected your plans?

WEDNESDAY 2 Corinthians 4:5-6 Ask God to shine His light in your heart.

THURSDAY Ephesians 5:8-9 What does it mean to you personally to be a child of light? How will you shine goodness on others today?

FRIDAY James 1:17 What good and perfect gifts has the Father of the heavenly lights given you?

SATURDAY 1 Peter 2:9 How does knowing that you are chosen and called by God add beauty and meaning to your life?

I cannot tell you
how the light comes,
but that it does.
That it will.

—Jan Richardson,
“How the Light Comes,” *The Cure for Sorrow*

Many people in Sweden, other Scandinavian countries, and in her native country of Italy honor St. Lucia's Day on December 13. Tradition tells us that Lucia, whose name means *light*, brought food and aid to Christians hiding in the catacombs under the hostile reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian. She wore a crown of candles to light her way through the darkness as she brought light and care to those in need.



In celebration, a family's oldest daughter rises early, dresses in a long, white gown with a red sash and a twig crown topped with nine lit candles, and wakes her family for a pastry breakfast in a candlelit room. In the evening, people parade through the streets by torchlight, ending in a central location where they combine their torches to light a giant bonfire.

Following Lucia's example, how will you share light and aid with those in need?



LIGHT REFRACTION EXPERIMENT

You'll need: a sticky note; a marker; a clear plastic water bottle, full and label-free.

On the sticky note draw two arrows, one above the other with each pointing the opposite direction. Stick the note on a wall with a counter/desk in front of it (i.e., a clear spot on your kitchen wall/counter). Slowly move the filled water bottle in front of the sticky note and carefully notice what happens...

The arrows will appear to change direction!

What's going on? It's called "refraction," the bending of light as it passes through a substance, in this case, plastic and water.

How might the light of Jesus change the way you see things? If possible, share a specific example.

Week 4
The Light of Joy
December 20—23

Say aloud together: Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Light four candles: We light these candles to celebrate Jesus, who comes into the darkness to shine the light of hope, life, glory, and joy.

Read Scripture: Luke 2:8-21 (Shorter reading: Luke 2:8-14)

Read: On an ordinary dark night at work, the shepherds huddled around a fire for warmth while the sheep clustered together, some bleating and shuffling their hooves to kick up nibbles of grass, others leaning in for support as they slept on their feet. Into this ordinary every night darkness, angels burst forth to explode the inky-black sky, heralding the light of extraordinary joy: the long-awaited Messiah’s birth.

Pray: With the angels we sing, *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.* Messiah Jesus, in your name we joyfully wait and pray. Amen.

MONDAY 1 John 1:5-7 What do you do to keep walking forward in the light?

TUESDAY 1 John 2:9-10 How are light and love, darkness and hate, parallel? Who do you need to forgive so that you can walk in the light of love?

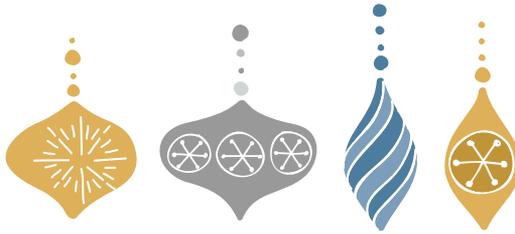
WEDNESDAY Revelation 22:5 How do you imagine eternity with God in heaven?

“...God dances amidst the common.... The angel came in the night because that is when lights are best seen and that is when they are most needed. God comes into the common for the same reason.”

—Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*

Ukrainians prepare a traditional twelve-course meal to celebrate Christmas. A family's youngest child watches through the window for a first glimpse of the evening star, a signal that revelers can commence feasting.

In many southern European and Central and South American nations, a manger scene is the primary Christmas decoration. St. Francis of Assisi created the first Live Nativity in 1224 to help others appreciate the significance of Jesus' birth. Visit MVPC's drive-by Live Nativity on Christmas Eve from 5–7 pm.



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS TREASURE HUNT

Add a new spin to your tradition of viewing Christmas lights by tallying how many of the following items you spot:

- A nativity scene
- Angels
- A star
- Santa on a rooftop
- A reindeer with a red nose
- A snowman
- A penguin
- A candy cane
- Characters from The Peanuts – Snoopy, Charlie Brown, Linus, etc.
- Disney characters
- The Grinch
- An elf
- A giant wreath of lights
- A snow globe
- Lights blinking in time to music



Christmas Eve & Christmas Day
The Light of the World

December 24—25

Say aloud together: Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Light all the candles: We light these candles to celebrate Jesus, who comes into the darkness to shine His light of hope, life, glory, and joy for the whole world to see.

Read Scripture: Matthew 1:18-21

Read: God loves the world so much that He wrapped up in swaddling clothes the best gift we will ever receive: His Son Jesus, who lived and died and rose again to save us from our sins. As we exchange gifts on Christmas, and on every day the whole year through, we remember that we love because He first loved us. We walk by faith because He shines His radiant light over the whole world and straight into our lives.

Pray: Everlasting God, we receive the gift of your Son who lights up the world. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

“Christmas is the celebration of the event that set Heaven to singing, an event that gave the stars of the night sky a new brilliance.”

–Billy Graham, *Hope for Each Day*

Gentle me,
Holy One,
into an unclenched moment,
 a deep breath,
 a letting go
 of heavy expectancies,
 of shriveling anxieties,
 of dead certainties,
that, softened by the silence,
 surrounded by the light,
 and open to the mystery,
I may be found by wholeness,
 upheld by the unfathomable,
 entranced by the simple,
 and filled with the joy
 that is you.

—Ted Loder, “Guide Me into an Unclenched Moment,”
Guerillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle





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