



ADVENT
& CHRISTMAS



Introduction

Advent can be a little bit subversive.

In the midst of the chaos of the Christmas season, despite the pressures to buy the right gifts or decorate the most beautifully or host with the most grace or keep the holiday weight gain at bay, there is an invitation: *to be formed by waiting*.

We don't want to be formed by waiting, if we're honest. What we want is to no longer be waiting.

But if we allow ourselves to be fully present in the longing and the ache of waiting, we come to understand more deeply that all our waiting can be flavored by this truth: we are a people to whom Immanuel has come.

Could we, in these weeks, carve out some space to be still? Could we turn down the volume enough to cultivate quiet? Could we return to the central themes of the Advent and Christmas journey—hope, peace, joy, love and light—and allow them to root us in a firmer foundation?

Using this Devotional

For each week, this devotional offers a reflection on the week's theme written by one of our elders, two additional readings with questions for reflection and application to use throughout the week, and a prayer of examen to aid you in looking back over the journey of the week. Our hope and prayer is that you are able to sit with each of these Advent and Christmas themes in meaningful and even transformative ways.



Hope

Advent Week One
December 1-7

Reading

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:1-4 ESV)

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:20-25 ESV)

Reflection

The subject of hope, for me, is a very slippery one to think about and a difficult thing to settle my mind and heart firmly upon. Common usage of the word applies to so many things that never quite turn out the way one “hopes” they will. We hope, implicitly or explicitly, for things to come in life that will make it meaningful, fulfilling or enjoyable in some way, at the risk of disappointment or even despair when those hopes aren’t fulfilled. On balance, some of us may be able to point to moments in our lives which are beyond what we’ve hoped for. But hope is very future-oriented, and it continues to play a part in our lives for what has not yet come to be.

When the Scriptures speak of hope, then, we bring our own stories to our understanding of the term. How else are we to relate to the concept if not from our own experience and desires? But a close reading of these passages about hope in Romans brings us to a deeper understanding of hope itself as God sees it. Most of us understand futility as the enemy of hope. It can crush our hopes. But here, Paul says that God subjected His created order—the world we live in—to futility “in hope” to achieve for us an incomprehensible level of freedom.

Here futility seems to become a necessary qualification of the hope that God has for us, a hope He wants us to share.

In the season of Advent, we are reminded that our ultimate hope is in the life, death, resurrection, and particularly the *return* of Jesus Christ; this is an imperishable hope that fulfills our adoption as sons and daughters of God, the Creator of all that is and the lover of our souls. This is the hope that endures suffering, pain and disappointment. Living in the reality of this hope gives us reason to endure even in times when the hopes of this world seem fewer. In spite of life’s futility, the longing of hope seems built into our character. We can’t live well without it, particularly when our hopes are not fixed upon the hope with which our Lord and Father God has subjected His creation. Our hopes need to be grounded in God’s hope.

In this season, may your hope be renewed and become the foundation of all you hope for in this life and the next!

Application

When you think of the word “hope,” what comes to mind most strongly and frequently?

How do the passages in Romans relate to the hope, or hopes, that you have?

Prayer

Lord, in this season of hope, help us to align our hopes with the eternal hope that You give to us. May all our hopes find their source in You and be guided by Your will and ways. We pray in the name of Jesus and in the hope of His return. Amen.

Author

Paul Dubuc serves as an elder at Scarlet City. He has worked for many years as a software engineer for AT&T and CAS. He is also a graduate of Ashland Theological Seminary with a practical theology degree in spiritual formation and is a trained spiritual director. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with friends and family, reading, and cycling. He and his wife, Mary Beth, live in Clintonville. They have two adult children and two grandchildren.

Further Reflection Throughout the Week

Reading

“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.” (Isaiah 64:1-4, ESV)

Reflection and Application

Reflect on the current circumstances in your life where you are asking God to show up, to act. Spend time asking Him to do just that.

How does it feel to hold this promise that God “acts for those who wait for him”? Pay attention, without judgment, and bring these emotions before God.

Reading

“Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.” (Psalm 130, NIV)

Reflection and Application

How does this depiction of waiting and hoping resonate with you?

The invitation to “put your hope in the Lord” is an invitation to action, not simply emotion. In what ways might you take steps to respond to this invitation, even during this Advent season?

Prayer of Examen



An “examen” prayer is simply a prayer in which we play back our day or week with God, inviting the light of the Holy Spirit to illuminate what’s good and true, so that we might see our lives a little bit more like God sees them. You might even allow the Advent candle to remind you of this. We tend to see our days under the shadow of our own perceptions about ourselves and God and others. But when we invite God, God casts the light of hope, peace, joy and love for us to see more truly.

This week, we’re doing this particularly through the lens of hope. First, allow yourself to be drawn into God’s loving and attentive presence, without any hurry to “begin.” This is where we begin. Then, simply invite God to take you back through your week, and notice: Where did you notice any hope in your week? What gave you hope or stirred some hope in you—whether that was Scripture or a conversation with a friend or a passing thought that you had? What was that hope? What was it like for you to think about and reflect on hope this week? Where did you find it difficult or heavy, or perhaps, comforting and encouraging? What does hope feel like for you?

Peace

Advent Week Two
December 8-14

Reading

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:2,7 NIV)



Reflection

Is there a Christmas movie character you relate to? Ralphie? Buddy the Elf? John McClane (we should probably talk if this is you!)? I’m ashamed to admit there’s a scene in *National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation* where I can relate to Clark Griswold.

For those that don’t know much about the Vacation movies, Clark’s wife Ellen sums up his persona (and essentially the crux of each movie in the series) well: “It’s just that I know how you build things up in your mind, Sparky. You set standards that no family event can ever live up to.” In *Christmas Vacation*, Clark convinces Ellen that a big family Christmas at their house is a great idea.

Reflection Cont.

Fast forward to the scene when the family arrives. The doorbell rings. The door slowly opens. And the whole family has arrived all at once! It's utter chaos in their foyer; people are in each other's faces, invading personal space, and everyone is talking over each other in absolutely ridiculous conversations. After everyone moves further into the house, Clark steps out the front door and says, "I'll park the cars and check the luggage...and yeah, I'll be outside for the season." What would you do in a moment like this? I think I'd escape, too!

So why is it so hard to find peace in life? Maybe, like Clark, we look for it in all the wrong places: TV, cellphones, music, circumstances, creating order in our lives. We can even look to many of God's many beautiful gifts like books, nature or relationships in search of peace. But none of these things can fully satisfy, because they are all flawed in some way. They will all eventually let us down. Yet, we ask them to do for us what they cannot do. Our worship is dislocated. In John 14:27, Jesus describes a different kind of peace. This is not a worldly peace, but an otherworldly peace.

And in the surrounding passage, Jesus tells us He must leave us for us to have this peace: the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks of His Spirit as life, grace, truth, holiness and wisdom. Do those words sound like peace to you? The Bible refers to this peace as "shalom": a perfect, whole-life peace. This peace always satisfies.

As we celebrate Advent, we often hear the words of Isaiah the prophet: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). "Prince of Peace." Do you see that? Advent points us to Lent, the miracle of Easter, and the gift of peace given to us at Pentecost in His Spirit. Thank God for His marvelous plan. Now that's perfect peace. Shalom!

Application

What kind of peace is missing in your life?

And where do you look to find it?

At Scarlet City, we talk about making space for God. How can you make space for God so you can receive the peace He promises?

Prayer

All-knowing Father, You had a beautiful and loving plan from the beginning. We know that, yet we go astray and look for our peace elsewhere. We lament our brokenness. But we are so grateful for Your victory and Your Spirit living in us. Isaiah 26:3 says “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” Give us the faith to rely on Your Spirit, so we can rest in Your promise. Amen.

Author

Todd Walter is first of all husband to Elise and father to Alaina and Emi. He is an elder at Scarlet City, and a Partner with The Joseph Group, a local wealth management firm. The Walters live in Worthington and have been attending Scarlet City since 2011.

Further Reflection Throughout the Week

Reading

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.” (Micah 5:2-5, ESV)

Reflection and Application

Consider what it might mean for Jesus to be your peace. How might peace be more expansive than just an emotion or the absence of anxiety? How might your experience of peace be deepened simply by recognizing God’s presence with you?

Reading

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. He says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” (Psalm 46, NIV)

Reflection and Application

Practice lectio divina (Latin for “divine reading”) with this passage: read it (preferably out loud) several times, and notice what words, phrases or ideas stand out to you, then stay with those and spend some time talking to God about what is coming to the surface for you.

Prayer of Examen



Throughout the season of Advent, we're made especially aware of the tension between the "now" and the "not yet." God offers us peace today, and yet there is peace we still long for. We can have peace and yet still be waiting for that peace to come into particular (maybe many) places in our lives, in our world and in ourselves.

As you allow yourself to be drawn into the presence of the God who loves you, who sees where you need peace and who offers you peace, invite the Holy Spirit to walk you back through the week with you as you reflect:

What stood out to you from your readings about peace this week, whether because it resonated or produced friction for you? What was it about that passage, image or language? What do you notice about how it sits with you?

Where did you need peace this week? Maybe in a relationship, in your environment, or within your own self, your heart and your thoughts. What is it like for you to invite Jesus to bring His peace into these places where you need it? How does Jesus respond?

As you look ahead, what is the peace you desire? How does Jesus respond to your desire for peace?

Joy

Advent Week Three
December 15-21

Reading

“For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him; strength and joy are in His place.... Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!” (1 Chronicles 16:25-27, 33, NET)

“But may all who take shelter in you be happy! May they continually shout for joy! Shelter them so that those who are loyal to you may rejoice!” (Psalm 5:11, NET)

Reflection

I have been referring to this year (sort of tongue in cheek) as “my year of joy.” It started not quite on a whim, but on what I’d say was a gentle prodding of the Holy Spirit drawing my focus to the topic of joy.

Several personal circumstances have made the past few years hard, and God, I think, wanted to remind me, as He says in Isaiah 43:18-21: “I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” And He wanted me to find fresh joy in Him.

Joy has long been something I desired, and I think that is true for all of us. Joy is a frequent topic in Scripture, and even a command. God wants our joy—and more specifically, God wants *my* joy—perhaps even more than I do: innocent, childlike, restful, obedient joy.

Reflection Cont.

God wants us to live in “right position” to the world, His creation, the spiritual realm and to Himself. When we do this, we can live with total freedom. As Tim Keller says, we are “self forgetful,” which allows us to be more ready and open to whatever the Lord might bring across our path to participate in.

God wants us to put ourselves into active pursuit of joy. Reflecting on Nehemiah 8:10, Ajith Fernando says: “Joy is our strength. Lose the joy, lose the strength.”

It may be hard to trust God and choose joy when we’re facing challenging times. Under stress we often narrow our vision and fail to see a clear way forward. I have found myself stuck in this feeling of hopelessness more than once. But I, for one, want to choose to trust the *goodness* of God.

Who you perceive God to be either taints or enriches your experience of Him. Why would we not then take Him at his word and treat Him as He claims to be—our Loving Father—who wants us to experience His *best*?

So this year I’ve been trying to intentionally pursue joy in a wide variety of ways. I’ve reconnected with simple pleasures that brought me joy in my youth: music, Legos, soccer. But there’s something in those things that draws out an element of my personality, which God has given me. It is an expression of who He made me to be, and it helps me to operate in a way that is free and open to others. That, friends, is closer to where the real treasure lies.

Deep joy comes from the Lord. Seeing His goodness and perfection is deeply satisfying. As has been immortalized, it is “the chief end of man to glorify God, *and to enjoy Him forever.*” So let our joy first be in our good and loving Father, but also remember that our joy is further enhanced by getting involved in His story and mission to love others.

Application

When was the last time you felt a deep sense of joy? What led to that experience? Is there an echo of God's voice in what you encountered? What might you learn about God from that experience?

What are some things that bring God great joy? How might you join in His celebration?

Prayer

Father, give us the joy of the Lord. Open our eyes to the freedom You have given us. Let us rejoice in Your goodness and grace. No greater joy exists than being fully known and yet fully loved. Thank You for loving us, for loving me, in this way. You have made me with unique gifts, talents and passions that reflect Your character and contribute something unique to the world. Let me use those giftings as a testimony to You and to Your greatness. Let me bask in Your joy and be filled with it such that my cup overflows. And let me reflect Your joy to those around me, bringing a cherished and refreshing gift to the world.

Author

Adam serves as an elder and leads a men's Bible & Prayer Group. Along with his wife Jamie, and daughters Addison (18), and Aubrey (15), the Rapps have been members of Scarlet City for over 10 years. If you've recently read a good book, accomplished something meaningful, or seen a rare bird, Adam would love to hear about it.

Further Reflection Throughout the Week

Reading

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”

(Habakkuk 3:17-19, NIV)

Reflection and Application

Where in your life do you see a fig tree without buds, a barren vine or field, or other types of scarcity? What might this “yet I will rejoice” look like for you? Spend some time in reflection and prayer about having a joy that is rooted in the Lord and not merely in circumstances.

Reading

“And on this mountain he will destroy the covering which is over all people, the covering which is spread over all the nations. He will take away death for all time. The Lord God will dry tears from all faces. He will take away the shame of his people from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken. It will be said in that day, ‘See, this is our God. We have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited. Let us be glad and full of joy because he saves us.’” (Isaiah 25:7-9, NLT)

Reflection and Application

How might you cultivate joy? Perhaps practice now, by identifying specific areas or seasons where you have seen God’s saving and restoring work in your life, and speaking to God about this.

Prayer of Examen



In some traditions, the third Sunday of Advent is called “Gaudete Sunday.” *Gaudete* means “Rejoice!” but it may also call to mind the word “gaudy,” which is usually a kind of tasteless showiness. This is what that one pink candle is like standing out among all those purple candles or what it’s like to be asked to “Rejoice!” in the midst of a season of darkness and longing. This week simply reminds us that joy and longing can be allowed to co-exist and that we can always invite the light of joy to flicker, especially in our dark nights. Right now, whether you find yourself rejoicing or grumpy or hurting or all of the above, begin by simply letting yourself be seen in the place where you are, under God’s loving gaze. Then, after taking a minute to rest there, invite God to glance back upon your week with you:

What stood out to you from your readings about joy this week, whether because it resonated or produced friction for you? What was it about that passage, image or language? What do you notice about how it sits with you?

Where could you notice small or great stirrings of joy breaking into your week? Maybe it was your own joy, or maybe it was joy being experienced by others around you. What was it like for you to encounter this—surprising, refreshing, difficult? What do you suppose it was in you that rejoiced or had a hard time rejoicing? What kind of joy do you want to be able to have (or maybe it’s hard to think of having any joy right now)? What is it like for you to talk with God about this? How does Jesus respond?

Love

Advent Week Four
December 22-24

Reading

“For this is the way God loved the world: he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17, NET)

Reflection

These verses are the Christmas story, directly from the mouth of Jesus. Even more, they are the story that the entire Bible is pointing toward. God is love. He created us for loving relationship with Him and one another. Sin entered the world and fractured our ability to love and, thus, fractured those relationships. But God didn't end the story there. He promised to make a way that we couldn't make for ourselves. The Christmas story is the beginning of the end of God making good on His promise.



Reflection Cont.

For me, among all of the good things in the Christmas season, sometimes this reality can get a bit lost. Even the reminder to “remember the reason for the season” has been muddled by all of the niceties floating around at this time of year: joy, peace, generosity, family, light, rest, tradition, and on the list goes. All are genuinely good things and certainly connected to the Christmas story. Yes, Jesus is “the greatest gift.” But the true star of the show is the “why”: love!

In these verses, John uses a bit of double meaning, as he often does, to give us a fuller understanding of what he’s talking about. “The way” that God loved the world is the *manner* in which He loved the world but also the *extent* to which He loved the world. He loved so much that He gave his “one-of-a-kind” Son. John set the stage in his first chapter, where we’re told that Jesus was with God in the beginning, active in creation. He created image bearers to be participants in the never-ending, self-sacrificing love of the Trinity. And when those image bearers ruined it? He kept on loving to the point of sacrificing Himself on our behalf, that we might partake in that love once more. John reiterates in 1 John 4 that God is love and echoes and expands upon the words of Jesus here.

There is so much beauty and goodness in the Christmas season, but also so much distraction. We cannot forget that at the core stands the unparalleled, unshakeable love of God. The beauty of that reminder is even when Christmases come that aren’t all that beautiful or all that good, God’s love remains. When we fail or fall short, God’s love remains. He has already done the work, and we know the end of the story. We get to go back to Eden, where we can once more fully enjoy the love of God and one another.



Application

Spend some time considering how you might re-center the love of God in your Christmas season.

Prayer

Father God, thank You for Your love. I pray that Your Spirit would enliven my soul with the steadfast compassion and self-sacrificing love of Jesus. I want to know Your love more deeply this Christmas, that others would catch a glimpse of Your love in and through me. Amen.

Author

Keith Robinette is an elder and City Group leader at Scarlet City. He and his wife, Amanda, have been a part of Scarlet City since 2012, along with their children, Lincoln (8) and Clara (5).

Further Reflection Throughout the Week

Reading

“By this the love of God is revealed in us: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. We love because he loved us first.” (1 John 4:9-10,19, NET)

Reflection and Application

Practice another lectio divina with this passage: read it (preferably out loud) several times, and notice what words, phrases or ideas stand out to you, then stay with those and spend some time talking to God about what is coming to the surface for you.

Reading

“Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ’s love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing...None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.”
(Romans 8:38-39, MSG)

Reflection and Application

Check in with yourself; how true do these words feel to you? Be honest with God about the answer, and ask Him to deepen both your understanding of His love and your experience of that love. Perhaps carve out some time today or in the coming days to ask this again and open up some space to listen or receive.

Prayer of Examen



Advent is typically a season of looking for the light to come in the middle of a dark and cold season. As Christmas day approaches, you might have allowed yourself to *feel* that light approaching—the light of God’s love for you and for the world, coming into the world—or if not, you might allow yourself to feel its warmth and illumination now, as you reflect on how God has been with you through your week.

What stood out to you from your readings about love this week, whether it resonated strongly or produced friction for you? What was it about that passage, image or language? What do you notice about how it sits with you?

Where in your week did you experience being loved (or else, where in your week would you have wanted to experience this love)? What was that experience for you, and what did it feel like? Invite the Holy Spirit to draw you back into that moment, and ask God if there’s anything more for you to receive there.

What is it like for you to talk with Jesus about how you experience God’s love? How does Jesus respond to you and to what you’re feeling?

Christmas

Light to the Nations
December 25-January 4

Reading

“Then Jesus spoke out again, ‘I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” (John 8:12, NET)

“[God] says, ‘...I will make you a light to the nations, so you can bring my deliverance to the remote regions of the earth.’” (Isaiah 49:6, NET)

Reflection

Christmas is a season of light and joy, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world. The theme of light runs through the entire narrative of Scripture, revealing God’s purpose for His people to be a “light to the nations.” This concept is rooted in the prophecy found in Isaiah 49:6, where God says, “I will make you a light to the nations, so you can bring my deliverance to the remote regions of the earth.”

Reflection Cont.

This prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. As Jesus stood in the middle of the treasury of the temple, during the Feast of Booths, in front of a giant lamp signifying the light that led God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 13-27), He declared, "I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." By declaring this, He not only ties Himself to the Exodus story but actually claims to be the orchestrator of the redemption of God's people.

Now, because of His redemption, we as followers of Christ are called to reflect this light. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:14-16: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

What does it mean to reflect the light of Christ this season? Light does three things.

Firstly, light is the source of LIFE. It causes plants to grow, it makes the atmosphere balanced so that we can breathe, and it gives the nutrients we need for health.

Light is also the source of TRUTH. It illuminates the world around us, showing us the reality of color and physical objects. Light tells us what and where things are. If there is no light, we cannot see where we are going or enjoy the beauty around us.

Thirdly, light is the most basic source of JOY. Late in December, we all start to crave more sun because the gray brings sadness. Light literally eases that depression, like flipping on the light switch in a scared child's bedroom.

Light then is life, truth and joy.

This Christmas, let us remember that we are part of God's plan to be a light to the nations. As we celebrate the birth of Christ, let us shine His love, peace, and joy in a world that desperately needs hope. May our lives reflect the light of Jesus, guiding others to the true reason for the season—the Savior who came to bring light to all people.

Application

Spend time meditating on John 8:12. How can you practically bring the life, truth, or joy of Jesus Christ to your family and neighbors this Christmas?

Prayer

Father of light, Jesus our light, and Spirit: show us the light. We praise You for being our life, our truth, and our joy. Would You shine so brightly in us this Christmas season so that we can truly be a “light to the nations”?

Author

Nick Nye serves as an elder and City Group leader at Scarlet City. He is the Executive Director of For Columbus, a movement to unify the Church of Columbus for the City of Columbus. He is married to Brittany, and they have four children: Viola, Charlotte, Simone, and Elliott.

Further Reflection Throughout the Week

Reading

“The people walking in darkness see a bright light; light shines on those who live in a land of deep darkness. You have enlarged the nation; you give them great joy. They rejoice in your presence as harvesters rejoice; as warriors celebrate when they divide up the plunder. For their oppressive yoke and the club that strikes their shoulders, the cudgel the oppressor uses on them, you have shattered, as in the day of Midian’s defeat. Indeed every boot that marches and shakes the earth and every garment dragged through blood is used as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us.” (Isaiah 9:2-6, NET)

“*In him was life*, and the life was the light of mankind. And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.” (John 1:4-5, NET)

Reflection and Application

How does this image of light entering darkness resonate with you?
Identify areas of darkness in this season for you personally. Where is there—or might there be—light? Ask God to show you.

Reading

“I want you to share your food with the hungry and to provide shelter for homeless, oppressed people. When you see someone naked, clothe them! Don’t turn your back on your own flesh and blood. Then your light will shine like the sunrise; your restoration will quickly arrive. You must actively help the hungry and feed the oppressed. Then your light will dispel the darkness, and your darkness will be transformed into noonday.” (Isaiah 58:7-8,10, NET)

Reflection and Application

What does this passage reveal to us about the character and heart of God?
Ask God to give you eyes to see how He might be inviting you to bring light in your neighborhood, family or workplace.

Prayer of Examen



As Christ enters the world, He brings us His peace—a light in the darkness—yet it’s a peace that doesn’t change everything at once; it works its way slowly into our world, unfolding and enacting the Kingdom of God here. So we keep looking for it to keep arriving. And we continue to watch and reflect on our week for where it shows itself in and around us.

What stood out to you from your readings about light this week, whether it resonated strongly or produced friction for you? What was it about that passage, image or language? What do you notice about how it sits with you?

As you replay the events and places of your daily life this week, where could you notice the presence of Christ in your everyday world? Where might the Holy Spirit like to show you where Jesus was in your week, offering Himself as light? Or, where would you like to invite this light? What is it like for you to talk with Jesus about how you experience Him as light, or how you experience joining Him in bringing light? How does Jesus respond to you and to what you’re feeling?

Thank You

Devotional Contributions

We are so grateful to the individuals on our elder board who contributed to this year's Advent & Christmas Devotional; thank you for your willingness to generously bring your gifts to shepherd this community of faith.

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