



LIGHT THE WAY

2018 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL RESOURCE

USING THIS DEVOTIONAL RESOURCE

The purpose of this guide is to give our MPC family a supplemental resource for midweek worship. Within these pages, you'll discover how the Advent story lights the way to Jesus and how Jesus then lights our way to heaven.

Each devotional connects to our Advent sermon series, *Light the Way*. As we move through these weeks together, I pray these materials will be helpful in your personal devotions, family worship, Community Group, or other gatherings.

Nothing in the world is better than walking with Jesus. May we all experience the power of his presence this Advent.

Merry Christmas,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James Forsyth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J' and 'F'.

James Forsyth
Senior Pastor

THE MEANING & PURPOSE OF THE ADVENT SEASON

The great proclamation “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14) assures us that God has entered into human history through the incarnation of the Son. The season of Advent, a season of waiting, is designed to cultivate our awareness of God’s actions – past, present, and future. In Advent we hear the prophecies of the Messiah’s coming as addressed to us – people who wait for the second coming. In Advent we heighten our anticipation for the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament promises, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, death will be swallowed up, and every tear will be wiped away. In this way Advent highlights for us the larger story of God’s redemptive plan.

A deliberate tension is built into our practice of the Advent season. Christ has come, and yet not all things have reached completion. While we remember Israel’s waiting and hoping and we give thanks for Christ’s birth, we also anticipate his second coming at the end of time. For this reason, Advent began as a penitential season, a time for discipline and intentional repentance in the confident expectation and hope of Christ’s coming again.

The Advent season includes the four Sundays preceding Christmas. Worship on these Sundays is designed to help people see the tension between celebrating and hoping.¹

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

The lighting of Advent candles dramatically depicts the growing expectation we have for the coming of Christ, the light of the world.

The traditional Advent wreath has four purple candles (lit on the four Sundays of Advent) grouped around a white Christ candle (lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day).² The main symbolism portrayed by the wreath is the growing intensity of light as we light an additional candle each week, building anticipation for the celebration of Christ’s coming.

Some congregations attribute particular meaning to individual candles, associating them with hope, peace, joy, and love; with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the magi; or with other related aspects of Christ’s coming. This year MPC will associate the four candles with the themes of prophecy, Bethlehem, shepherds, and angels.

As you use these materials for personal devotions, family worship, in your Community Group, or other gatherings, you may even want to use an Advent wreath and light your own candles throughout the season as you read through the devotional each week.

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²A tradition calling for the third candle to be pink is not especially important. It is based on a medieval tradition in which the second to last Sunday of Advent accented Christian joy in the middle of what was traditionally a penitential season.

THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 2

LIGHTING THE PROPHETS CANDLE

Through the prophets of the Old Testament, God promised to redeem his people. He promised restoration to the broken, comfort to the afflicted, healing to the sick, and sight to the blind. Through the prophets, God promised to bring light into the darkness and salvation to the lost. These promises were fulfilled in part through the birth of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago, and they will be fulfilled completely when he comes again in power.

CALL TO WORSHIP: PSALM 119:81-82, 88

My soul longs for your salvation;

I hope in your word.

My eyes long for your promise;

I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

In your steadfast love give me life,

that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth.

PRAYER

Gracious Lord, thank you for being faithful to your promises. Thank you for sending Jesus to bring us salvation and eternal life. Thank you for your never-ending love for us. Give us your peace and comfort as we rest in your promises and await Christ's return with longing, hope, and joyful obedience. Amen.

SONG: O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL - VERSE 1

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.

SCRIPTURE READING: ISAIAH 9:1-7

MEDITATION: "IN THE DARKNESS, HOPE IS COMING" BY JAKE JENKINS, DIRECTOR OF STUDENT MINISTRY

On the night of August 3rd, 1914, before England joined WWI, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey stood with a friend at his office window and watched the gaslights being lit on the streets below. "The lamps are going out all over Europe," he stated, "and we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." It must have felt the same way for the people of Israel as their enemy brought darkness to their land. Fear and darkness filled every heart and there was no hope in sight.

This is the setting for the prophet Isaiah's words: "For unto us a child is born." Isaiah wrote these words almost 700 years before Jesus was born, but he talks about these events as if they had already happened. His nation and people are under attack and almost defeated, yet Isaiah writes of a present hope. A hope that answers Israel's deepest longings and needs.

During Advent, sometimes we experience darkness because we are more aware of our deepest longings. Some of us may long for broken relationships to be healed. Others may long for every tear to be wiped away, or for good health, or even just not to be lonely anymore.

*Hope is here.
Hope is coming.*

The good news of Advent is that, like Israel, we also have a present hope. Think about the names Isaiah gives the Messiah. *Wonderful Counselor*: Jesus is a supernatural source of wisdom. He is hope for those who need divine direction. *Mighty God*: Jesus is divinely strong and powerful. He is hope for those who are weak. *Everlasting Father*: Jesus will care for his people forever. He is hope for those who feel alone. *Prince of Peace*: Jesus will bring deep and lasting healing to relationships. He is hope for everyone who needs peace with each other and with God.

For 700 years, Israel waited in hope for the Messiah to arrive. They knew their hope was already with them but not yet complete. Those 700 years brought exile and hardship. During Advent, we too wait for Jesus in hope. We wait for the day when he wipes away every tear, when all sad things will become untrue, and when his light outshines all darkness.

Hope is here. Hope is coming.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) "Sometimes we experience darkness because we are more aware of our deepest longings." What are your deepest longings? How can they be fulfilled in Christ now and at his second coming?
- 2) Jesus is a source of extraordinary wisdom. How might Christ's wisdom brighten up the darkness this Advent season?

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God's Spirit spoken to you in today's Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Thank God for the specific ways you have experienced his promises of hope, peace and comfort.
- 2) Pray about one or two ways you sense God's Spirit moving you towards joyful obedience.

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 9

LIGHTING THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE

Bethlehem reminds us again that God is faithful to his promises. It also reminds us that God comes to us in the humble and simple. Bethlehem was in the territory of one of the least influential tribes of Judah, yet out of Bethlehem comes the King of kings. Bethlehem reminds us that Jesus was born in a small town; that he was born in a stable; that he was born to people of no fame. Bethlehem is God's statement that he brings hope in the darkness and does great and wonderful things from humble beginnings.

CALL TO WORSHIP: PSALM 130:5-8

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

PRAYER

Gracious Lord, give us hearts that long for you. Humble us and forgive our sins. Open our eyes to see your light shine in the darkness. In all circumstances, help us to trust in your unfailing love as we anticipate Christ's return with joy. Amen.

SONG: O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL - VERSE 4

O come, thou Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

SCRIPTURE READING: MICAH 5:1-5

MEDITATION: "IN THE DARKNESS, HOPE IS HERE" BY CAROLYN SINCLAIR, DIRECTOR OF CARE MINISTRY

Looking at the preceding chapters of Micah, the prophet is giving a stern and fearful prediction to the people of Israel about what is to come. In the midst of this, Micah writes of the birth of a King. He writes with anticipation looking forward to God fulfilling his promise to his people.

The word anticipation means looking with expectation of something happening. For some, the feeling of anticipation is good and exciting and these people spend a good deal of time trying to create that feeling. For others, anticipation fills them with anxiety and dread - they do all they can to avoid it.

Feelings of anticipation, whether positive or negative, cause us to feel alive. This is why when we lose the ability to anticipate things to hope for, we can become depressed. When we are depressed, life is filled with darkness, and it is difficult for us to have hope. When we lose hope, we do not anticipate or look forward to things.

...may we look with anticipation that leads to hope - hope not for things that we create, that depend on us or our circumstances, but hope residing in Christ.

As one commentator put it, in Micah 5:1-15, the prophet is begging the people of Israel to look forward to the coming of the promised King, the answer to their greatest dreams. Micah is begging the people to have hope no matter their current circumstances.

Thanks to the New Testament, we have something that the Old Testament readers of Micah did not. We know how this prophecy was fulfilled - how God indeed was faithful and kept his promises to his people. Christ indeed has come to be our Savior, the divinely empowered head, our shepherd, with all authority given to him by the Father.

We no longer live in anticipation of the Messiah coming, but we do live in the in-between times before he comes again. In this in-between time, we experience anticipation about many things. We anticipate things that are good, such as the birth of a child, the start of a new school year, a new job, or family gatherings. We anticipate things that are not good, such as job loss, sickness, or hard conversations.

This Advent season, as we reflect on Christ's birth and anticipate Christmas, may we look with anticipation that leads to hope - hope not for things that we create, that depend on us or our circumstances, but hope residing in Christ. Our hope has come. Hope in who he is, that he is faithful to his people and promises. May our hearts leap with joy and anticipation to love and serve our Savior.

REFLECTION QUESTION

- 1) How does anticipating Christ's second coming make you feel?
- 2) How might you live differently in light of Christ's first and second coming?

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT (CONTINUED)

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God's Spirit spoken to you in today's Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Praise and thank God for the unique ways you are experiencing his faithfulness and unfailing love.
- 2) Ask God to shine the light of Christ into specific dark areas of your heart. Confess any sins God brings to your mind.
- 3) Ask God, by his Spirit, to lead you in faith, hope, love, and joyful obedience, even in the midst of this present darkness.

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 16

LIGHTING THE SHEPHERDS CANDLE

Fear, shock, curiosity, wonder, awe, and joy. Just imagine the emotional rollercoaster the shepherds must have felt on the night of Jesus' birth as an angel of the Lord appeared and God's glory was revealed. The shepherds in the Christmas story remind us that God cares for the lowly outcasts. God values all people, no matter their rank, class, or position. God, in his grace, comes to the humble and contrite in spirit.

CALL TO WORSHIP: ISAIAH 66:1-2

Thus says the LORD:

“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.

But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.

PRAYER

Gracious Lord, give us humble and contrite spirits. Let us receive the message of your coming with awe and wonder. Make us curious to find out all that we can about you. Help us to discover the places in the midst of our daily lives where you meet us with your gospel, and help us to share this good news of great joy with others. Amen.

SONG: O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL - VERSE 2

O come, O come, thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law in cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 2:8-21

MEDITATION: “THE AWE AND FEAR OF THE LORD” BY CHARLES LEWIS, PASTORAL INTERN

There is something about glory that resonates with the human soul. We crave it because we were created for it - to behold it and to become glorious ourselves. Hard to define, we know glory when we see it. Whether it's Alex Ovechkin raising the Stanley Cup or the finest meal you've ever tasted that satisfied desires you didn't even know you had, we've all encountered some measure of glory.

Sometimes trying to imagine God's glory feels impossible. That's because the glory of God isn't meant to be some abstract idea separated from the concrete details of life. Theologian John Frame describes glory as “God's visible presence among people.” We get a clear picture of this in Exodus. In this book about deliverance and God's faithfulness to his people, we see God's glory manifested in a cloud (Exodus 16:10), which radiated brightly on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:16) and dwelled in both the tabernacle and temple with Israel (Exodus 29:43, 40:34). God's glory is the visible manifestation of his joy, blessedness, beauty, perfection and holiness with us.

In Luke 2:8-21, we see the shepherds (the outcasts of society at that time) in the field tending their flock in the dead of night when an angel of the Lord appears. With the glory of God shining all around them, we read that they are filled with great fear. Why? If we're honest, coming into the presence of God ought to be somewhat terrifying. He is pure joy, and we strife. He is pure blessedness, and we desolation. He is pure beauty, and we ugliness. He is pure perfection, and we imperfection. He is pure holiness, and we sinful man. When we come into the presence of God, we become ever aware of our sin. In his presence we ought to be destroyed.

God's glory is the visible manifestation of his joy, blessedness, beauty, perfection and holiness with us.

But the angel of the Lord assures them “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” The angel of the Lord tells of Emmanuel (God with us). The fullness of God was pleased to dwell in a baby in a manger wrapped in swaddling cloth. Just as God brought the Israelites out of slavery into the Promised Land, this promised child would deliver us from sin and death and bring us into life everlasting. In his death and resurrection, Messiah would bring many sons and daughters to glory. He's more glorious than a Stanley Cup win and the best meal you've ever had. This is good news for outcasts and sinners like ourselves.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Think of a time when you've encountered something you would consider glorious. How does it compare to the glory of God?
- 2) Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." What is this verse saying? How are you experiencing this to be true personally?

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God's Spirit spoken to you in today's Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Praise God for the distinct ways he has revealed his joy, blessedness, beauty, perfection and holiness to you in Jesus.
- 2) Thank God for delivering you from specific sins, and ask him to continually do so.
- 3) Ask God in his kindness to lead you in revealing his glory and good news to others: your family, friends, co-workers, classmates, and neighbors.

THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 23

LIGHTING THE ANGELS CANDLE

The angels are God's messengers who announce the good news of the coming of the Lord. The angel, Gabriel, spoke to Mary and Joseph to announce the birth of Jesus. The angels sang out with joy to proclaim Jesus' birth to the shepherds. The angel Michael announces the coming of Christ again in the Revelation to John. Let's rejoice with the angels even today as we wait with joy for Jesus' coming.

CALL TO WORSHIP: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-5

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand

PRAYER

Gracious Lord, thank you for drawing near to us by your Spirit, and for revealing yourself to us through your Word. Thank you for sending Jesus into the world to save us from sin and death. Help us always to rejoice in you and your gospel message of good news. Amen.

SONG: O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL - VERSE 3

O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell thy people save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 1:18-25

MEDITATION:

"THIS IS GOOD NEWS" BY MATT STONE, DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

When we think of angels, what comes to mind? Wings, white robes, Clarence and his ringing bell from the movie "It's a Wonderful Life"? Probably, but that's not what is happening here. This angel has one of the most important jobs of all time. He is actually a herald, a messenger announcing a supernatural event to Joseph. In fact, it was so unlikely and unbelievable that apparently it required an angel to deliver this news to Joseph. Mary, his betrothed, a virgin was to give birth to the Son of God and his name would be Jesus. Joseph required a special messenger to convince him of this supernatural event. This is the "Good News," that Jesus came to save us from our sins. This "Gospel" announcement of salvation and of the Father's love for us is the essence of Advent. That we could know God and that his love for us would become flesh, fully human and fully divine in the person of Jesus Christ, is truly "Good News".

Joseph's world was turned upside down by this messenger and his message. The angel illuminated Joseph's mind and Joseph responded with courage and great faith as he cared for Mary and was an earthly father to Jesus. He was changed by the Gospel.

As you reflect on the reality of this "Good News", where do you find this message intersect with your life in Christ this Advent season? Have you been changed? Have you encountered Christ in a way that has changed your life? You most likely will not encounter an angel, but the truth of the "Good News" is no less true. The angels' message and the candle represents a reminder that Jesus has come and he has illuminated our minds and hearts of the reality of the Father's love in the person of Jesus Christ. Do you require an angel in the night to make it a reality? You really don't need an angel, you just need Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Joseph's world was turned upside down by this messenger and his message. How has the goodness of Christ turned your world upside down?
- 2) How is Christ's illuminating presence a source of courage for you?

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God's Spirit spoken to you in today's Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Thank God for specific times in which you've felt him draw near to you.
- 2) Ask God to strengthen your courage and faith in him in the specific areas you feel weak.
- 3) Praise God for the ways you've seen the power of Christ made manifest in your life (light shining in the darkness).

2018 ADVENT SCHEDULE

SUNDAY, DEC. 2ND

ADVENT COMMUNION

7pm in the Sanctuary

SUNDAY, DEC. 16TH

LIVE NATIVITY

9am on the Lodge Lawn

CHRISTMAS CONCERT & RECEPTION

7pm in the Sanctuary

MONDAY, DEC. 24TH

FAMILY CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

3pm & 4:30pm in the Fellowship Hall

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICES

6pm & 8pm in the Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall

MCLEANPRES.ORG/CHRISTMAS