Our 2026 Advent Theme is ***CHILD OF LIGHT***, helping us focus our worship and devotional times upon two key elements.....the CHILD.....and the LIGHT.

This Advent devotional booklet has been prepared by Trinity members as a way of stirring our thoughts and strengthening our lives. The devotionals include not only daily scripture readings for our meditation and study but also daily devotionals from the hearts and minds of fellow worshippers at Trinity. Each day's scripture and devotional closes with a prayer.

CHILD OF LIGHT is an interesting focal theme. It will find expression in our pastor's sermons, our actions during worship services, our discussions in classes and informal settings, and of course in our personal devotions and day to day lives.

One of the key scripture passages for us throughout Advent and Christmas 2026 is John 1: 1-14. This beautiful passage from John 1 uses the image of Light to help describe the meaning of Jesus Christ. It helps us see the advent of Jesus as a human child through the lens of eternity. We hope you are able to find time and space in your life to allow these verses.....and indeed all of scripture.....to shape YOUR heart and mind as you live for Him. Here are some excerpts from that passage:

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*
>
> *[9] The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—*
>
> *[14] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Our Advent Carol this year, *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*, is a hymn which will be new to many of us. (You can find its text and tune reprinted as the last page of this devotional booklet.) Its message helps to undergird and give further expression to the Advent theme. We will enjoy learning it together!

In this compilation of Advent devotionals, our brothers and sisters at Trinity Baptist have shared from their hearts various thoughts, questions, answers, and interpretations of what this season means. Our collective prayer is that the Light of Christ shines in and through your life.

Billy Orton
Interim Minister of Music and Worship

Advent 2026

November 29	Isaiah 9: 2-6	Dixie Paschal
November 30	Micah 5:2	Teresa Bowers
December 1	Psalm 27: 1	Lane Craig
December 2	John 12: 35-37	Debbi Marsh
December 3	Ephesians 5: 13-14	Carrie Anne Cooley
December 4	Revelation 22: 5	Sheryl Rigby
December 5	Luke 11: 34-35	Carolyn Hall
December 6	Isaiah 26: 3	Bryan Bennett
December 7	John 9: 4 and 14: 27	Julie Reyburn
December 8	Matthew 4: 16	Jessica Haywood
December 9	Isaiah 11: 1-10	Roman Sherrod
December 10	James 1: 17 and John 3: 16	Vincent Vassar
December 11	Ecclesiastes 2: 13	Jonathan and Mary Matthewson
December 12	1 John 1: 5-9	Elizabeth Lomax
December 13	John 15: 11 and 8: 12	Renée Ryan
December 14	Psalm 139: 7-12	Glenn Bowers
December 15	Isaiah 40: 1-5	Peter J. Bernstein
December 16	Isaiah 12: 2-6	Jennie Prinkey
December 17	Ephesians 5: 8	Joy Orton
December 18	Revelation 21: 23	Frank McCall
December 19	1 Peter 2: 9 and 1 John 4: 18	David Tew
December 20	Isaiah 11: 1-10	Dave Ryder
December 21	Colossians 1: 11-20	Mary Oliver
December 22	John 1: 1-14	Billy Orton
December 23	Luke 2: 1-7	Dan Walther
December 24	Luke 2: 8-14	Bryan Cobb
December 25	Luke 2: 15-20	Mike Oliver

Trinity Baptist Church expresses gratitude to our Advent Devotional Booklet team whose efforts brought this project to completion: TBC Worship Committee members Alicia Sherrod (chair), Bryan Cobb, and Julie Wills. Special Appreciation is also extended to TBC Publications Secretary Joanne Brann for her work in final layout and printing.

A Light in the Darkness

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." Isaiah 9:6

Have you ever walked through a season of darkness? Perhaps it was a time of uncertainty, grief, loneliness, or fear about what the future might hold. In those moments, it can be difficult to see beyond our circumstances. We may wonder when things will get better or where God is leading us.

Isaiah 9:2 tells us, "The people that walked in the darkness have seen a great light." These words were spoken to people who knew hardship and uncertainty. Yet God gave them a promise: darkness would not have the final word. A great light was coming! That light was Jesus Christ.

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah. He described Him as Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. What a wonderful promise! God was not simply sending someone to improve the fate of His people, He was sending a Savior who would change their lives forever.

Jesus is still our light today. When we are confused, He is our Wonderful Counselor. When we feel weak, He is our Mighty God. When life changes and the world feels uncertain, He is our Everlasting Father. And when our hearts are troubled, He is our Prince of Peace.

As we reflect on this passage, let us remember that our hope is found in Jesus. Look toward the Light. Jesus has come. His promises remain true, and His love is greater than our fear.

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus, the Light of the world. When darkness surrounds us, help us remember that we are not alone. Help us trust Your promises even when we cannot see the way ahead. May Your light shine through us so that others may find hope in You. In Jesus' name, Amen

~ Dixie Paschal

Hidden in Plain Sight

In one of our Weekday Preschool Chapel times this fall we talked about the story of Samuel and his search for a new king. When Samuel goes to Jesse and asks to meet his sons, they all look like king material to him, but God says none of them are the one. It's Jesse's youngest son, the smallest, hidden away in the fields watching the sheep, who will be the next king.

God seems to enjoy hiding things sometimes. Or at least hiding things in places and in people we don't expect. Micah foretells of the coming of the Messiah in Micah 5:2:

"*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are smallest among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*"

So the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, the smallest town in Judah (and called the City of David by the way!), not from the city of Jerusalem where the kings lived.

Henri Nouwen says that "Jesus, the Word of God, is hidden in humanity." He was born in a small town to a working class family during a time of military occupation. His life was not spectacular, except for the miracles he performed, which he often instructed people to keep secret. He died a death of a criminal and his resurrection was only made known to a few of those who followed him. Nouwen says, "God became a lowly, hidden, almost invisible God in bodily form. And this is the real power of the word."

I wonder if it is not so much that God is hidden from us, but that we are blind to what is in plain sight – the glory of God, the evidence of his love for us everywhere, embedded in every created person and thing. May this be a season that brings those sacred things, hidden in plain sight, to our attention.

God, please help us to see. Amen.

~ Teresa Bowers

This One Thing

I'm not much of a multi-tasker. In college, the best that I could do was listen to smooth jazz instrumentals while doing schoolwork. On the other hand, so many others of my colleagues had no problem completing their homework in a bustling coffee shop, all the while carrying on a conversation with friends while watching the ongoing football game on their phone. There are so many distractions in our lives that constantly pull us away from the main thing we wanted to get done that day. The dishes need to be emptied (again), you're sitting in traffic only to get rear-ended at the stoplight, you thought the argument with your friends was over only for it to be brought back up again. Distractions and the unexpected happen to us all.

During the holiday and Advent season, I think that many of us resonate with the weight of these pressures more and more. Throughout Psalm 27, the Psalmist exclaims to God, saying, "*One thing* I have asked from Yahweh, this I look for, that I may live in Yahweh's house all the days of my life, to gaze at Yahweh's loveliness, and come each morning into his palace" (Ps. 27:4) (italics mine).

The Psalmist sets their sights on just one thing. Their focus is knowing the simple truth that the LORD is their light and salvation. When that is the focus, our sole focus, it shapes the way we respond to the distractions. As we look forward to the birth of Jesus, what do you want to be the sole focus that your entire holiday season, your attitude, and your responses are shaped around?

Holy Spirit, as we look forward to Christmas day, fixate our entire being on Your goodness. As we navigate through the complexities of the holiday, help us to be mindful and conscientious of you in all things. Amen.

~ Lane Craig

Walking in the Light

Advent is a time when we look forward to the arrival of Christ. We know of his coming birth and his promised return. When you read the scripture you hear Jesus addressing the crowd, He issues a plea to the people, asking them to walk in his light while they can. He says when the darkness falls, they won't be able to find their way. Has there ever been a time when you felt you were in the darkness? Maybe you felt fear, pride, distraction or spiritual fatigue. Trusting in the Light will transform us to become children of the light.

Unfortunately, many of the people would not believe He was the Messiah, despite the miracles they experienced. Jesus asked us to walk in the light, not just observe it. This means choosing hope, practicing generosity, and allowing truth to reshape us. We are part of God's family, so let His light shine though us for others to see.

So during this advent season, think about what you can do to walk in the light so others may see.

Lord Jesus, Light of the World, shine into the places where I have grown dim or distracted. Teach me to walk in your light with courage and trust. Form me into a child of light who reflects your hope in a world of longing for you. Amen

~ Debbi Marsh

Shine a Light

As I sit to write this, it is October and Pastor Mike is currently going through a series on the Sermon on the Mount. He noted that in Matthew 5, Jesus tells us that we are "the light of the world". In Ephesians 5, where we find our reading, Paul echoes the same sentiment noting in vs 8 that "now you are light in the Lord." We are light, but what are we to do with that light?

This year, the James Clemens competition marching band show involved the theme of light and darkness. At the end of the show, the narrator notes how as she goes out into the world, she took the light with her. We as believers are to do the same...carry the light of Christ with us wherever we go. But not just to make the world a better place. We shine light in the dark places of our world in order to point others to Christ.

My favorite part of this passage is Ephesians 5:14 which reads:

> "Wake up, sleeper,
> rise from the dead,
> and Christ will shine on you."

Christ is our ultimate light. He came into the world, shining on us to make us aware that we are dead in sin and our only way to eternal life is through Him. Now that we have that light, we are to point others to Him.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending Jesus into the world to shine on us, awaken us from the dead and to give us life in Him. Amen

~ Carrie Anne Cooley

The Importance of Light

Revelation 22:5 And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.

Before electricity, the sun's rising and setting was used to start and end the day's work; while the pattern of the stars illuminating the night sky was a navigation tool for sailors. Today we can turn on lights when it's dark, utilize our car's headlights for visibility, and employ our phones for a portable light source. Light feels warm and safe, a roaring campfire can ward off dangerous animals, and lights can also be used as visual effects to entertain us. We are drawn toward light.

But, what about, "The Light"?

Throughout scripture the word "Light" is used as a metaphor for God, Jesus and Scripture. Examples include, 1 John 1:5 "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all" and John 8:12 "I am the light of the world.". In Psalm 139 we read that "darkness is as light to God". Psalm 119:105 refers to scripture saying, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.". As we are physically drawn to light here on earth, spiritually we are also drawn to the Light of Christ. The importance of light throughout history and its parallel to our relationship with Jesus is inspiring.

In Revelation 22, John shares a vision of Heaven in which God's perfect holiness will illuminate everything and all of the Redeemed (that's us!) will share in reigning over the new heaven and new earth. Light is important. Being in The Light is eternal.

Dear Lord, Please give us the desire to walk with you daily and to share with others the joy that we receive from being in relationship with you. Amen.

~ Sheryl Rigby

Healthy Eyes

"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness."

Do you have healthy eyes? Anybody who meets me will notice that I wear glasses, because my eyes just don't work correctly. Even when I am in a well-lit area, I cannot see clearly – either up close or far away. My eyes need help to be able to function and give me a good understanding of my surroundings.

Jesus said that my eyes are also the "lamp" for my body/soul. If my eyes are functioning correctly, I will see Him working in my life and in this world and His Light will shine into my life. After all, Jesus said that He is the Light of the world (John 8:12).

When we no longer see Christ for who He really is, our eyes become unhealthy and let darkness enter our life. We might begin to focus on other "shiny things", but those distractions are a far cry from the true Light. As theologian John Piper says, "*There are many bright things in the world that keep us from seeing the true light of Christ—just like city lights keep you from seeing the stars.*"

Our spiritual eyes were made to see Christ as our Light. He is what illuminates our lives and lights our path. If we have developed unhealthy eyes, let us put on our "corrective lenses" this season and reacquaint ourselves with the Light of Christ, through Scripture, music, and community.

Dear Lord, thank you for healthy spiritual eyes that let Your Light into our lives. Amen.

~ Carolyn Hall

A Steadfast Trust

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

Before Christ's birth, Isaiah pointed us toward a promise of peace between humankind and a righteous God. The weariness we feel from uncertainty, worldly reasoning, and fear is relieved as Isaiah reveals a profound spiritual truth: true peace isn't found in the absence of trouble, but by way of our trust in God.

For generations, the faithful waited for the promise that God's judgment was stored up to be poured out on his own incarnate Christ in our stead. While Isaiah had a future hope, it is our blessing that this hope is our own present reality. We trust in a promise fulfilled, not in a grand display of worldly power; but in a humble birth, an inglorious death, and the miraculous, world-defying resurrection and ascension of our Lord.

In the birth of Jesus, God's ultimate plan of redemption cuts through the chaos and rebelliousness of our world. Christ, the Prince of Peace, made flesh for us to see and hear.

Christ's birth demonstrates that God's plans are trustworthy and unfailing. Jesus bridged our separation with God, bringing peace and reconciliation. The manger reminds us that we can anchor our minds on God's Word because He keeps His promises, no matter how much time passes or how impossible the circumstances are for us alone.

As we reflect on the miracle of Christ's birth, let our hearts settle into the peace He came to bring. The God who fulfills His promises, both in the quiet of a manger at night and in the daylight having defeated death itself, will surely keep your soul in His bosom such that none can take it from him.

Lord, give me faith where I lack and show me hope when I can't see it. Let my mind rest in the trust I have in you.

~ Bryan Bennett

Trusting God in the Dark

"What time will you get here?" Phillip asked in his text.

"Late," I typed back. "We won't leave until the girls get out of school."

Last November, Abby Kate, Lily, and I traveled to Panama City Beach to visit my friend Tracey and her husband, Phillip. Jeff couldn't join us, so I was behind the wheel. It was a stressful trip.

We hit Birmingham during peak rush hour, then rain made the drive even more difficult. My hands and shoulders ached from gripping the steering wheel.

But the real challenge came when we turned onto dark and unfamiliar two-lane roads just south of Montgomery. Cell service disappeared more than once. I didn't know where I was, and I could barely see where I was going. All I could do was trust the GPS to guide me.

Isn't faith sometimes like that?

We find ourselves on roads we never expected to travel, unable to see what lies ahead. We wonder how much longer the darkness will last and whether we're even headed in the right direction.

But Jesus reminds us in John 9:5, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

And in John 14:27, He promises, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

When we don't know where life is leading us, we can take comfort in the fact that God does. He never said the road would be easy, but He did promise we wouldn't have to travel it alone.

Sometimes faith means loosening our grip, trusting His direction, and taking the next turn even when we can't see beyond the headlights.

We don't have to be afraid of the dark when we know the Light is leading us.

Lord, when the road ahead is uncertain, help us release our fears, trust Your guidance, and find peace in Your light. Amen.

~ Julie Reyburn

Jesus is a Light Switch

We are in the midst of the dark days of the year. We have about 14 hours of darkness each day in Alabama in December. Our reality is it is not as physically dark as it used to be, thanks to light bulbs! You don't realize how much you rely on power until the power is out and you instinctively keep turning on the light switches as you walk through the house. We rarely sit in the darkness around us, there is almost always a light or screen on if we are awake.

If you tour Cathedral Caverns, when you get to the back of the cave they turn off all the lights used to light the rock features and walkway and you'll experience true darkness. Many of us have experienced a mental or spiritual darkness that has felt comparable to the darkness in the back of a cave.

Jesus was quoting Isaiah in this scripture, so the Jewish people listening to this potentially first sermon of Jesus would have been familiar with this prophecy. It wasn't the groundbreaking narratives he would tell in the coming years.

Jesus is the light that has come into the world. He came into the world for us in our well-lit times and in our darkest times. He came for people thousands of years ago without technology and those of us that continue to turn on the light switch when the power is obviously out. No matter how shadowed the land or filled with the finality of death, Jesus has come to light the way.

God, As we look at the twinkling Christmas lights, remind us that your son is the light promised and received. Thank you for the light! Amen

~ Jessica Haywood

Death Defeated

We serve a God who brings life out of death. The old stump of the royal tree of Jesse was apparently dead - long rotting by Isaiah's time with wicked king after wicked king, sagging towards an end 150 years later when Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, will be exiled into Babylon with many of his people. After lying dead for 600 years, God uses this stump of a monarchy to grow a new shoot; a new kingdom of every tribe, tongue and nation; a kingdom not of this world; a kingdom that struggles not against flesh and blood but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Where we see inevitable death between wolf and sheep, leopard and kid, calf and lion, child and snake, God is able to make peace and life.

As in the cosmos, as in the kingdom, so too in each of us. I was dead in my trespasses and sins; but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with him to live and walk in the light.

God of peace, Father who gives good gifts to Your children, we praise you for the gracious gift of your Spirit in us and your Son sent as signal to all peoples. Let us listen to that Spirit indwelling us; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Let us delight in the fear of the Lord. Guide us to judge with righteous judgment our actions towards the poor, the oppressed, and the wicked. Thank you for raising us from death to life. Help us to live in faithfulness, righteousness, and hope as we await the final coming of Your kingdom that will complete Your victory. Amen.

~ Roman Sherrod

A Father's Love

Some television fathers embodied the spirit of God. James Evans Sr. - *Good Times*, this hardworking Chicago father refused government aid, balancing multiple blue-collar jobs with "tough love" parenting and John Walton Sr. - *The Waltons*, Depression-era patriarch embodied quiet strength, moral integrity, and unwavering support for his children's dreams. These fathers led their families through difficult struggles in the hope of a better future. These father figures dealt with issues with an eye towards their Heavenly Father as a guidepost.

In the Book of Genesis, ...God created the heavens and the earth... created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Yet through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, man was separated from God. God provided many Prophets and Kings in an attempted to guide and return man to his side but through man's sinful nature redemption could not atoned.

One night, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to Jesus and said, Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him. Jesus informs him that unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Then he asks, "How can a man be born again?" The answer is revealed in John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

As we can see, God continued guide his children home, but their nature was resistance, so he had to send his only Son as an example for man. James 1:17, Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. In its spiritual nature, the kingdom of God is the salvation of His people, and the kingdom is His gift. It is also a gift of forgiveness of sin.

Lord, help us reveal your presence to a stiff-necked people, so that we all may know our Heavenly Father.

~ Vincent Vassar

Light and Wisdom

Though the author of Ecclesiastes is unknown, we know that the book is framed as the work of an "author" responding to the sermon of a "teacher" who is disputing claims from Proverbs that wisdom improves your life. The teacher recognizes the objective good in wisdom; however, he fears that death equalizes good and evil, saying "For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered...the wise too must die." (Ecclesiastes 2:16).

What, then, would be the purpose in wisdom? Couldn't we live as fools and end up just the same as those that live wisely? The author of Ecclesiastes gives a hopeful perspective in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: "here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, ... for God will bring every deed into judgment, ... whether it is good or evil." The author believes there is a hope in wisdom over foolishness, because God will judge all things in the end.

So we have hope in judgement – that those that live wisely will have their reward. However, who truly lives wisely? "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). What man is wise every moment of every day?

Thankfully, God knows our shortcomings. As we pursue the light of wisdom, He provides us the light of the world – Jesus. This descent of God into man gives us immeasurably more hope and light than the author of Ecclesiastes could have conveyed. John 1:4-5 describes the incarnation of Christ: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." We find hope in God's judgement, because the Child of Light given to us overcomes all of our dark foolishness. In turn, we pursue the light of wisdom in following His commands, knowing it transforms us to be more like Him – a pursuit that is certainly not meaningless.

God of Light and Wisdom, Thank you for your commandments and your grace that help us discern between wisdom and foolishness, to help us live better lives and live more like You. When we inevitably fall short, and fail, thank you for sending your Son to stand in the gap. Help us to everyday choose wisdom over foolishness, choose light over darkness, and, in all things, to choose You. Amen.

~ Jonathan and Mary Matthewson

Presence

From the beginning, light has been a beautiful symbol of God's presence and faithfulness. A star illuminated the night sky to announce the birth of our Savior. Jesus calls himself the Light of the World, and Psalm 119 reminds us that His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

In 1 John, we are reminded that God Himself is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. What a comforting truth! Through Christ, God has delivered us from darkness and welcomed us into His marvelous light. As His children, we are no longer defined by the darkness we once walked in, but by the light of the One we now follow.

As such, we are called to walk in that light daily. But if we're being honest, that isn't always easy. Sin, selfishness, and the distractions of this world can lead us astray. There are days when our choices don't reflect the One we follow.

Yet the beauty of this passage is that God continually calls us out of darkness and into His light. When we confess our sins with humble, honest hearts, He is always faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Walking in the light doesn't mean living a life without mistakes. It means continually turning toward God, allowing His truth to guide our decisions and His grace to redirect our steps. And as we walk in His light, we experience the gift of fellowship with Him and with one another.

This Advent season, as we celebrate the Light who came into the world, may we remember that His light still leads us today. We need only follow Him, trusting that He is faithful to illuminate our path and gracious to forgive us along the way.

Father, thank you for sending Jesus, the Light of the World. Help us to walk faithfully in Your light each day. Reveal the places in our hearts where we have allowed darkness to creep in, and give us humble hearts to confess our sins and receive Your forgiveness. May your word guide our steps, your grace renew our hearts, and your light shine through us so that others may know you. Amen.

~ Elizabeth Lomax

Celebrate the Light of the World!

Do you ever remember a time when you were in total darkness? It is enveloping, sometimes frightening and overwhelming. How did you feel when you were back in the light?

In John 8:12, Jesus speaks to those around him declaring, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Jesus spoke these words in the Court of Women where Jews historically celebrated the "Illumination of the Temple" during the Feast of the Tabernacles. This grand ceremony commemorated the pillar of fire that guided Israel on their wilderness journey. Four exceptionally large gold, oil filled, candelabras or menorahs were lit, and it was said the light shone so brilliantly it was seen throughout all of Jerusalem. Israel's holiest men would dance and sing psalms of joy and praise to the Lord throughout the night. This festival reminded them that God promised to send the Light, the Messiah, to free them from bondage, renew Israel's glory, and restore their joy. Jesus declared that He is the promised Messiah, our Messiah, and the Light that forever brings us out of the eternal darkness of sin's condemnation when we choose to follow Him.

In John 15, Jesus gives us the analogy of Himself as the vine and his followers as the branches. From verse 11, Jesus gives the result of abiding in Him. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Jesus came into the world to save us from sin's darkness and as redeemed believers, we have been given the gift of His joy!

Dear Lord, we praise you and thank you that though we will walk through many seemingly dark situations in life, we can rejoice and experience true joy because You are our Light and will always be with us!

~ Renée Ryan

I Can't Go Anywhere!

Let's think of a place where people go to relax. Next, think of another location that has a beautiful view! Now, think of a location that you **never** want to visit! Finally, can you think of a location that is dangerous, controlled by hatefulness, and jealousy? Which location could we choose and be beyond the Spirit of God?

David asks if is there a place, a location, that exists where we can we go that is beyond the reach of God's Spirit/Prescence. David then answers his own question! If I go to the heavens, the depths, fly east, west, over the sea, or if I try to hide in the darkness, the Spirit of God is there.

Sometimes, people hide in the darkness. Darkness can be the night, after the sun sets. Or there are other people who struggle with darkness in their lives stemming from anxiety, fear, isolation, and events in life that have caused them to feel as if they have no hope and that God isn't present with them any longer.

David shares that the Spirit of God is present with us: North, South, East, West, in this life and the next. God sent his son to be with us, Emmanuel - God with us. There is no place or feeling that separates us from the love of God. (Romans 8: 35-39) Think of a place (physical, spiritual, mental, or emotional) where God's Prescence is not already located. Correct! That place doesn't exist!

The toughest/worst locations and situations are where we find our God at work. God's Spirit and God's Love is everywhere!

"God grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end. Into your hands, I commend my spirit. Be our light in the darkness, and in your mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace." Amen

~ Glenn Bowers

Hope

Isaiah lived around the fall of the ten northern tribes to the Assyrians until roughly a century prior to the fall of Judah to the Babylonians. He had agreed to be GOD's messenger (Isaiah 6:1-6) in a vision he had. When you look at Isaiah's 66 chapters, the first 39 emphasize GOD's justice on Israel's constant refusal to repent from their sin and return to GOD in faith. These chapters pose many similarities to the Old Testament, both in number and message. The last 27 chapters center themselves on the Messiah and also have many similarities to the New Testament, both in number and message. An interesting note is that there are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. Though we know there is consistent grace and hope in both books as well as the promise in Isaiah 1-39.

As GOD's messenger, (Isaiah 40:1-5), GOD is consoling the remnants of the Israelites ~ ***and us as well*** ~ of the hope we have in the future arrival of the Messiah. Notice that GOD repeats himself in His message to console ourselves in order to emphasize the need we have for GOD's expression of agape love. Not only do we need to be consoled by the Good News of the Gospel but we also have an inherent responsibility to console others with whom we are in contact. GOD's infinite grace to pardon included a double portion for the sins of the Israelites. GOD's love for us as His children would also provide us with that same double portion of forgiveness.

We have hope of being able to go to the foot of the cross with our sin(s) because it is level ground. Notice the preparation of where we could physically be: making straight the road that leads to the cross; raising the low ground; lowering the high ground; smoothening the rough places. Not only does Israel have access to Jesus, the Messiah, but we also have access to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Our actions have consequences, but our faith in Christ and the price He paid on the cross is our salvation for eternal life with GOD.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the message of assurance and hope for the future that you had Isaiah prophesize over 27 centuries ago. His words are as relevant today as they were then. In humble faith we repent of our sin and accept your wonderful gift of grace and love you showed through Jesus's death on the cross to pay for the Sin of mankind.

~ Peter J. Bernstein

Joyful Praise

"[2] Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." [3] With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.[4] In that day you will say: " Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. [5] Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. [6] Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

One of the main reflections of the advent season is joy and the celebration of the coming life of Jesus. This passage points us to the joy of God as our salvation or the deliverer of our lives. He is coming to rescue us from our afflictions and that truly is something to be excited about. In our everyday trials the Lord is with us providing us comfort and strength. He is a light for us when we feel like we are in the dark, and he is our greatest source of comfort in troubling times. Because He watches over us we can say "the Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation."

We are called to proclaim the goodness of the Lord. Isaiah tells us to "Make known among the nations what he has done". Exclaim the goodness of the Lord through song, prayer and "shout aloud" of His glory. There is something so powerful about singing the Lord's praises. When we lift up the Lord in praise, we begin to experience the joy of his light. There is a children's song that perfectly captures that sense of joy and wonder of the Lord's work: "My God is so Big! So strong, and so mighty. There's nothing my God cannot do! The mountains are his and the valleys are his and the trees are his handiwork too." During this advent season, may we have the faith of children and experience the joy of the coming light that is Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, may we be reminded of the light and joy that you bring to the world. As we make known your goodness, we ask that you bless our lives. May our hearts be filled with praise and song for your Holy Name, Amen.

~ Jennie Prinkey

Walk as Children of the Light

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (ESV).

We find this verse in the middle of a passage that encourages the readers to walk in love, holiness, and wisdom. Paul, the writer of Ephesians, first reminds us of who we are: "You are light in the Lord" (see Matthew 5:14). Then Paul tells us how to live: "Walk as children of light." Our identity will shape our actions, our walk.

The larger passage, Ephesians 5:1-21, has several repeated ideas, including the command to discern and understand the will of the Lord (verses 10 and 17), and the repetition of the word walk. In verse 2, Paul tells us to "walk in love," in verse 8, "Walk as children of light," and in verse 15, "Walk ... as wise."

These ideas are closely connected. If we walk in love, in light, and in wisdom, then coarse and foolish talk will be crowded out and will have no room in our lives. Instead, our speech will be full of thanksgiving and praise (Ephesians 5:19).

When we walk in the light, we don't need to hide our actions or our words. Our lives should reflect what is good, what is right, and what is true (Ephesians 5:9). We can replace foolishness and immorality in our own lives with gratitude and thanksgiving. In this way, our words and our actions become a reflection of Christ's love to the people around us.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus as the True Light into the world. Help us to reflect your love by walking in the light of Jesus' love, by seeking your will, and by giving thanks continuously.

~ Joy Orton

The Light of God's Love

The light of God's love runs through John's writings like electricity through a strand of Christmas lights! From the opening of his Gospel to the closing chapters of Revelation, John returns again and again to that light.

His Gospel begins with God's light entering our darkened world in Jesus. We are promised that darkness cannot overcome it. This is the gift we celebrate in Advent.

John 1:4–5 (ESV)—*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*.

At the close of Revelation, John sees that promise fulfilled. God's presence illuminates the new creation. There is no more night.

Revelation 21:23 (ESV)—*And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the Glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb*.

John traces the light of God's love from incarnation to consummation, from arrival amid darkness to illumination of all creation.

We live between these visions, in the already and the not yet. Darkness remains. Division, suffering, and estrangement remain. How shall we walk in the light? John points the way.

1 John 2:9–10 (ESV)—*Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling*.

We enter the darkened world, just as Jesus did. We inhabit the world as it is. We love people as they are. We do not wait for darkness to disappear before we love. By loving through the darkness, we begin to walk in the light.

Lord Jesus, light of the world, give us courage to enter the darkness, grace to love others as they are, and faith that your light will one day illuminate all creation. Amen.

~ Frank McCall

Knowing Who We Are and What to Do

Have you ever been afraid because you did not know what to do? Perhaps you were in a new school, or a new job, facing a circumstance you had never faced before. I have been there. And I remember being very afraid of getting it all wrong.

In this Advent season, think of all the people who found themselves in new and unexpected situations. Mary found herself talking to an angel. Joseph learned his fiancé was expecting a child. The wise men had a vision that they should "ghost" Herod on their way home. There were many people with their own roles to fulfill. Were they afraid? Probably. But they became the people God called them to be and did the things God called them to do, playing their part in the coming of the Light.

I Peter 2:9 tells us who God has called us to be and what God wants us to do. We are God's own people, holy, and chosen as priests to our world, sharing the Good News that has come for all people. Here is who we are to be and our part to play in the Advent story.

Might we be afraid? Sure. But God's love surrounds us as we share the Good News with our world. And that love conquers our fear (I John 4:18). We know who we are. We know what we are to do. We are chosen, royal, holy and loved by God. We need not be afraid.

Lord, give us understanding of your calling on our lives. May we embrace the task of proclaiming the good news of the coming of your Son. Surround us with your love that we may not be afraid to accomplish our calling. May your love shine through our lives as it shown so brightly in a manger stall.

~ David Tew

Why Jesse?

...a rod out of the stem of Jesse... and a Branch... And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him...

According to Luke 4:18, Jesus almost got himself thrown off a cliff in his hometown of Nazareth when he referenced Isaiah 11:2—"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him"—and then proclaimed of himself, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Who did this lowly homeboy think he was? But the synagogue rulers and those in attendance certainly understood what he said and thought him worthy of immediate execution.

A complete description of Christ's mandate as a servant found in 11:2 can be linked to the six-fold description of the Power of the Holy Spirit resting on Him. *It's Of Wisdom, Of Understanding, Of Counsel, Of Might, Of Knowledge, Of Fear of the Lord.* But why would this power be invested in that homeboy of culturally scandalous and humble birth?

In Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12, the Hebrew word "Branch" can mean both a king and a common man, but most the time in Scripture a branch is interpreted as a living sprout. David was the first of the royal line. In contrast, Jesse was a common man, and the father of a shepherd; humble of origin. History records the royal line of David had sunk back to the level of a peasant.

How does this Jewish history apply to my life? Isaiah 11:10 brings this humble homeboy to our home: "*And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.*"

Father, Your Word desires for us to be like your Son Jesus. I ask, for Christmas, that we may have more of the same six-fold Spirit that you anointed Jesus with... for your glory and to enable us to be better humble servants.

~ Dave Ryder

A Perfect Christmas?

In our passage Paul is trying to encourage the church at Colossae who, like us, is struggling to stay faithful to Jesus' teachings. Paul writes to point out the supremacy of Christ. He is eternal, is before all things, holds all things together, is the head of the church, reveals the fullness of God, and reconciles all things through his death on the cross.

We like our Christmas trees to be perfectly decorated and our meals to turn out exactly as they do in the Instagram videos. Gifts must be purchased and all the things have to get done. However, we all know there are things that are not going to be perfect about Christmas.

We live in a fallen world where conflict and hard things exist. There are people who will not be present at Christmas. There are hurt feelings between family members. There is loneliness and brokenness. No one knew the realities of a broken world more than Mary and Joseph as they made their way to Bethlehem to pay taxes and be counted in a census conducted by the occupying Romans. She listened as the angel told her about the child she would carry, but she had no idea what the world would do to him. Verse 20 of our passage is so very important for us to hear in a broken world. *The Message* version says, "all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross." While we wait for the reconciliation that only Christ can offer, we can wait with confidence because he is our Messiah.

As we watch and wait, oh Lord, for the Messiah to reconcile our damaged world, help us to do our part as peacemakers and to love as Christ loves.

~ Mary Oliver

That Life Was the Light

The Gospel of John opens differently than the first three Gospels. Instead of starting with the beginning of Jesus' earthly life or His earthly ministry, John's Gospel starts with the beginning of history, the beginning of time itself. John 1 opens with these immortal statements about Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.....In him was life, and that life was the light of all....."

Of the four Gospels, John is the one perhaps best described as "the Gospel of Light." The writer repeatedly—and effectively—contrasts the images of Light and Darkness as the story and the meaning of Jesus unfold before our eyes.

During this Advent as we read and reflect upon such an extraordinarily beautiful and poetic passage as John 1: 1-14, let's attempt to move deeper into the understanding of its meaning as well as its application for our lives in the 21st century. Here are some questions to ask ourselves—

- Why does John focus upon the symbols of Light and Darkness?
- What exactly <u>is</u> this Light?
- Am I a child of God who shines with God's Light?
- In my life and witness, what words and actions can I use to give testimony of this? Am I able to paraphrase this passage in my own words? How can I transfer its meaning into actions in my life?
- What other images does the Gospel employ when referring to Jesus?

Today's prayer is taken from the second stanza of this year's Advent carol at Trinity (I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light), written by Kathleen Thomerson: "I want to see the brightness of God, I want to look at Jesus. Clear Sun of righteousness, shine on my path, and show me the way to the Father." Amen.

~ Billy Orton

God's Plan

Have you ever investigated your genealogy? People in ancient times relied on heritage to define who they were—who they would become—how important they were—who were their family.

The Roman empire used genealogy to count its citizens. But unlike today when you are counted where you presently live, everyone in the Roman empire was required to return to their ancestral town to be counted.

It seemed like just another requirement of the government for Mary and Joseph to make the journey to be registered and counted. But it was much more.

In ancient times, it was predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. "*Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times.*" (Micah 5:2 GNT)

Mary was the unsuspecting mother of this holy birth. And Joseph was just following the law to take her with him to the family hometown. Neither of them had any idea that this trip and this birth would be remembered outside their own family circle.

But the Bible predicts this event by the prophet Micah. It records this event in Luke and Matthew. And it describes the significance of this event in Isaiah and John. God's plan is always in play in the lives of his people.

We are his people. What does he have for us to do? We did this mission outreach—or was it God's plan? We cared for our neighbor in need—or was it God's plan? We invited someone to worship with us—or was it God's plan? We are his hands and feet and voice in today's world. And thankful that God chose us to help out.

Lord, we marvel at the plan you have for us, the careful way you integrate that plan into our lives, and the glorious results you achieve through our simple lives. Amen.

~ Dan Walther

Pointing to the Light

Years ago I discovered a painting by Daniel Bonnell called "Seeing Shepherds." (*Search online to view the painting.*) Bonnell created a stirring portrait of Luke's account of the public pronouncement of Jesus' birth. It has become one of my favorite pieces of Christmas art, but only recently have I seen the meaning of its title.

Both Luke (in words) and Bonnell (in brush strokes) paint the same picture. Shepherds, watching their charges alone in the night, are stunned by an explosion of light and an angel before them. They stand frozen, first in terror, then in awe and astonishment as the angel calms their fears and proclaims the birth of the long-awaited Messiah in King David's city.

A vast angelic chorus appears, spanning the sky and reflecting God's glorious brilliance. They join the messenger in an outburst of praise and a declaration of peace at the birth of the Savior.

Bonnell's painting hints at details beyond what Luke recorded. When viewing it, the eye follows the arc of angels into the distance, arriving at a shining star. A sliver of light from the star draws the eye down into darkness and to another, smaller point of light. Perhaps this lonely light shines from a stable. The angels seem to be pointing the way to the Child of Light—and the shepherds are seeing it.

What these "seeing shepherds" did next, we also should do: go and see for ourselves, and then tell others about what we've seen. For believers, as He did for the shepherds, God has already pointed the way to the Light in the darkness. All that remains is for us to point others to Him, too.

Lord of Light, thank you for showing us where to find the Light of the world, the Light of life, the Light of all mankind. Move us to point others to the Light, who shines in the darkness and is not overcome by it. Amen.

~ Bryan Cobb

What Do You See and Hear?

This passage from Luke's gospel is so beloved that many people know it simply as "The Christmas Story." It shows up in the famous Charlie Brown Christmas special and is read by Linus. The security blanket that Linus always holds is dropped just as he reads the words, "Fear not." The security of the Savior has come for us all.

As you read and reflect on this passage, perhaps there is something fresh you see or hear this year. It's easy to just skim over Luke 2 because we "know" the story so well. But, take a moment to consider what God might show you in this season of your life.

Perhaps you will notice that the Son of God was born in a specific time in history when Caesar Agustus was emperor of Rome. He seems to rule the world, but in a small corner of his empire, a greater king has come. Maybe you see that Jesus was born in the city of David, and you may think of the promise made by God that a king in the line of David will reign forever and ever. Jesus is the promised eternal king of all. Maybe you think about the simple cloths that Mary wrapped around the baby. As an adult, soldiers will gamble for his clothes at the foot of the cross, and he will be wrapped in burial cloths that are later found in the empty tomb (He is Risen). Maybe you need to hear the words spoken to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid." God is near to you today and that is a great comfort.

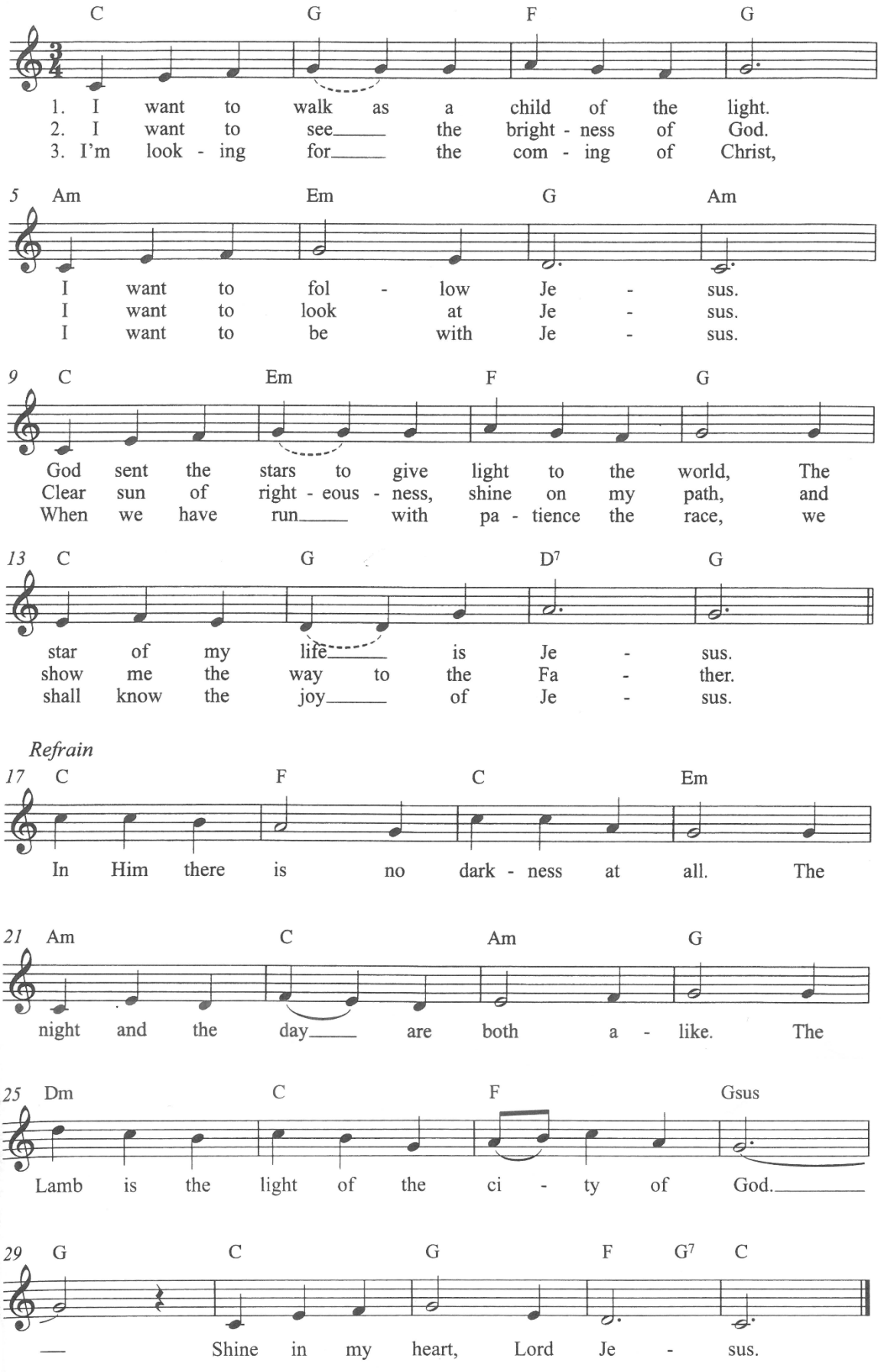
The passage ends with the shepherds glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. What do you hear and see this Christmas day?

Lord, today we thank you for the great love you show us in Jesus our Savior.

~ Mike Oliver

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Kathleen Thomerson



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