

# ADVENT DEVOTIONAL - WEEK ONE



Picture by ALC Online Contributor, Andrew Gulliksen

This year's Advent Theme is, *For Such A Time As This*, and follows along with the four candles lit each week through Advent. The candles include; 'Prophets', 'Bethlehem', 'Shepherds', and 'Angels'. The accompanying Scriptures offer additional reflection on the significance of this time of waiting to celebrate God's Advent among us through His Son, Jesus Christ. May your soul be nourished through engaging in these reflections during this special time. You're also invited to light the Advent candle(s) each day as you spend time in prayer.



## **Advent Day ONE - Sunday November 29, 2020**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. Isaiah 9:2

It isn't hard to believe that we've been living in a time of great darkness this year because of the COVID-19 virus. Yet throughout this time, it is easy for me to see God's light through the continuing mission of our church here at Ascension. When the lockdown occurred in mid-March, Pastor Dan and Pastor Daniel, Deacon Mary, Teresa Allen, Megan Miller, and our church secretary Ruth rapidly shifted our church service to being streamed on-line. We developed a Phone Tree to stay in touch with our members on a weekly basis. We provided meals to the IHN and CLC families. Our CLC stayed open the entire time providing child care services to First Responders and our local neighborhoods.

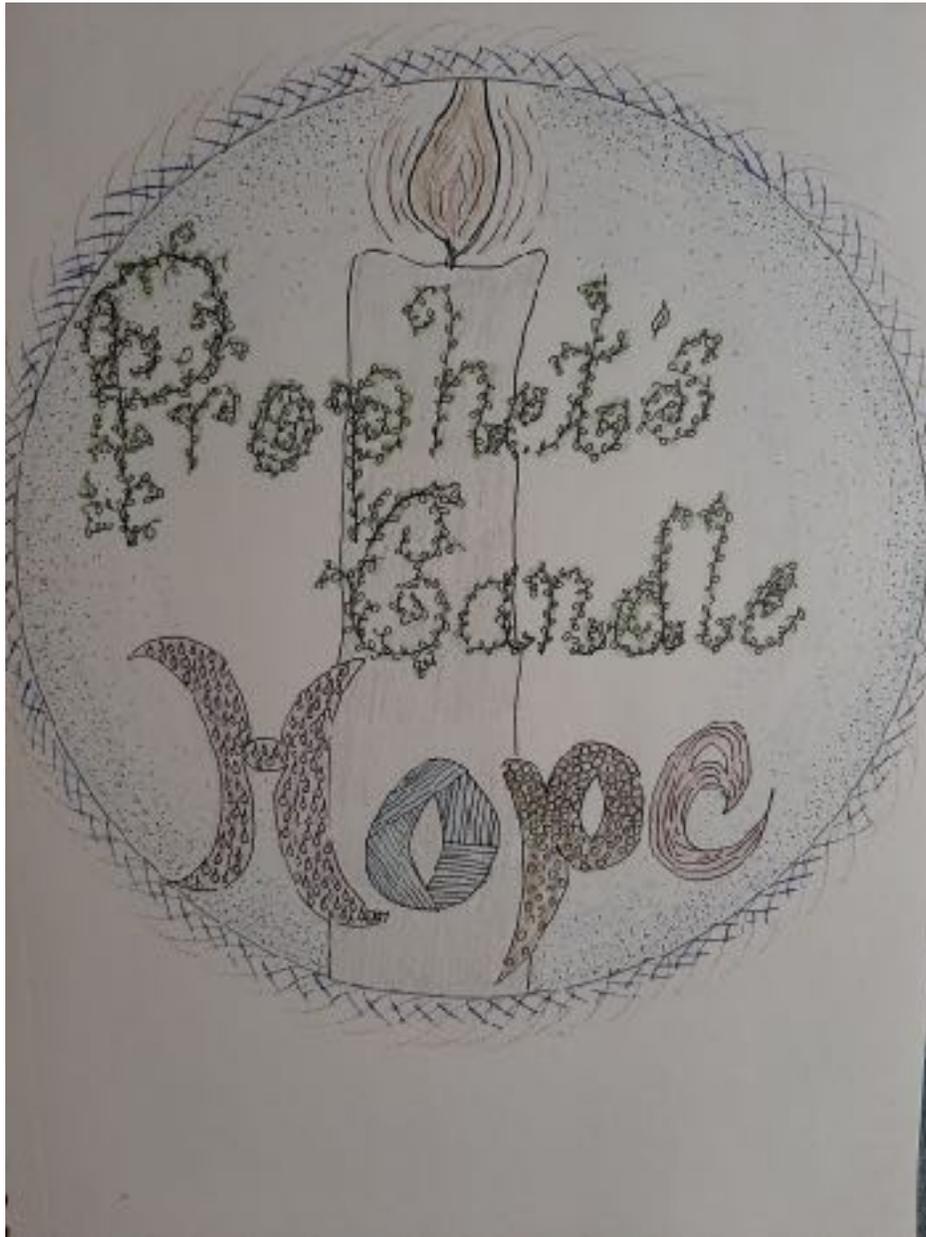
When our members needed support, it was there for them. In these last eight months, it has been easy to despair because of the on-going ravages of COVID-19, a bitterly contested political campaign, social and racial unrest. It has been easier to understand the trials faced by the God's Chosen People throughout the Old and New Testaments. But as it was in those days of old, God remains with us today, steadfast in his love for his creation.

**Prayer:** *Lord, as we prepare for your arrival during this Advent season, thank you for your undying love. Give us strength to maintain our faith in these trying times. Thank you for our family at Ascension and give us the patience to never lose hope. Amen.*

~John Hayes

## Advent Day TWO - Monday November 30, 2020

You're invited to reflect on the following artwork by Kathy Mannerburg. What captures your attention? What might you draw or create today that communicates HOPE to you? Take time today to **'stop'** from time to time and **'notice'** what is around you. Then whether it's through a spoken prayer or one in the silence of your heart or an artwork of your creation, take a few moments to **'engage'** in what you notice.



## Advent Day THREE - Tuesday December 1, 2020

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness---on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)*

Early in our marriage we lived in a small rural town in NE where Dan had his internship year. In those old days, long distance phone calls were expensive. One evening I received a long distance call from my mom. Her tone of voice immediately told me that something was terribly wrong. Tears mingled with her words as she told me the results of my dad's surgery: He was full of inoperable cancer. There was no treatment. The long phone cord followed me as I sank to the hallway floor, the news engulfing me in what felt like a deep darkness.

How could this be happening? They were soon to retire and travel again to Madagascar where they'd served for 25 years. There was so much to look forward to! And now this?

I had recently read Psalm 103: "The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love...as a Father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him." (v.8,13) These words revealing God's character were a light in the darkness of the following season of deep suffering and loss. Although God did not FEEL compassionate, gracious or abounding in love to me while surrounded by these circumstances, I knew it to be true. The truth in the psalmist's words was God's gift to me, the light shining in the darkness that the darkness could not overcome. (Jn. 1:5)

Physical healing prayed for and longed for did not come for my dad. But HOPE was present in the promise of resurrection. My father was diagnosed with cancer on Thanksgiving, preached his last sermon on Christmas Eve, and Jesus came to take him to be with Him (Jn. 14:3) on Easter morning. His prayer, "Jesus, come quickly!" was answered at last.

As for me, I continue to love studying God's word because it reveals Jesus, the living Word. From ELW #597, My HOPE is built on nothing less than Jesus. When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, Jesus is my anchor. When all supports are washed away, Jesus is all my HOPE and stay. On Christ, the solid Rock I stand. Indeed, all other ground is sinking sand.

**Prayer:** *Jesus, our Light and bringer of hope, thank you for your good character that is unchanging. You are gracious, compassionate, and abounding in love to us. May this give us HOPE and encouragement in our seasons of darkness. You are the light no darkness can overcome. Amen.*

~Sylvia Holt

## **Advent Day FOUR - Wednesday December 2, 2020**

The light came from a flashlight at 2 am. One of the chaperones turned off the light, squatted down next to my sleeping bag, and asked if I would please come with her to the bathroom - Nicole was crying.

Nicole was scared and homesick, and she wanted to go home. At first, she wouldn't even open the door of the stall, so I sat on the floor, talking quietly to her through the door. At the time, I taught in a district that was very strict about "separation between church and state", so I didn't pray out loud, but inside my mind, I was asking Jesus for help - to be a light in her darkness.

Eventually, Nicole came out of the stall, and I convinced her to go back to her sleeping bag. The chaperone loaned her the flashlight for the rest of the night, and I promised that, if Nicole needed anything, all she had to do was shine the light at the ceiling, and I would come.

**Prayer:** *The promise of a light in the darkness - the promise that help would come - sustained Nicole through the rest of that long night. May it sustain us now as we wait for His coming at Christmas. Amen.*

~Ingrid Daniel

## Advent Day FIVE - Thursday December 3, 2020

When Andrew Gulliksen prepared to take this photo, he did so with patience and intention. Making sure to get the shutter speed and aperture settings just right, he was able to capture the Prophet's candle light beautifully. As you look at this picture, or your own candle today, remember God's patient light at work in you. *How have you experienced God's light in your life, especially through a difficult time?*

**Prayer:** *O God, our light. Thank you for the promise and proclamation of your Son's Advent among us. May we do what we can to proclaim your light in our homes, community and world. Thank you we don't do this alone but have your Holy Spirit to guide and empower us. Amen.*



## Advent Day SIX - Friday December 4, 2020

I sometimes feel like the people of Isaiah 9:2 when I find myself walking in darkness. That darkness might show up as depression, loneliness, doubt, fear, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed. Fortunately, onto me "the light has shined" as well. When the darkness returns, I certainly have struggles that keep me in a degree of darkness as I look for light, for relief, for answers. I've shared my struggles in particular with my faith after finding myself in a very dark place during a frightening illness. I don't want to stay in this

darkness of faith even though I'm not sure how to get out or just what the light looks like that I desire.

This I do know; God has blessed me with a sense of history or tradition, a familiarity of a rich life of faith. I can recall and reassess from that foundation what I can let go of and what I yearn for to support me on my journey. God is also always there for me to plead with, talk to, yell at, to be a presence without words, to meditate with. God also shines as light on me through others who have cared for me, prayed for me, remembered me, shared time with me and expressed love in their own unique ways. "Bidden or not bidden, God is present".

~Kathy Mannerburg

## **Advent Day SEVEN - Saturday December 5, 2020**

Lightning bugs... How I loved those lightning bugs as a child. Memories of warm summer evenings that lasted til, I don't know, 9pm? It was one bug I didn't mind holding in my hands just so I could peek through my fingers and watch those little bodies flash on, then off, on and off. Man, could those little buggers light up the night, sparkles all around. It was a mystery how they did that, from inside out, right?

Lightning bugs... They were mentioned in a devotion I was reading a couple evenings ago and the first thing that came to mind was the song, "This Little Light of Mine". I used to sing it with gusto as a child, did you? I would say our children still do, especially the verse, "Hide it under a bushel, No!, I'm gonna let it shine...", from inside out. A light within US, right? What are we going to do with this light?

Taking phrases from one of my "newer" favorite songs, "Christ Be Our Light", I pray:

"Christ be our light, shine in our hearts shine through the darkness

Christ be our light, shine in your church gathered today."

"Make us your own, your holy people...

Light for the world to see...

your living voice...

your bread, broken for others...

your building sheltering others...

servants to one another..."

Lord, please give us the strength to let our lights shine. Amen

*Hymn excerpt from "Christ Be Our Light" Songwriters: Bernadette Farrell, Kamahl permission "for non-commercial use only"*

*~Wini Klein*