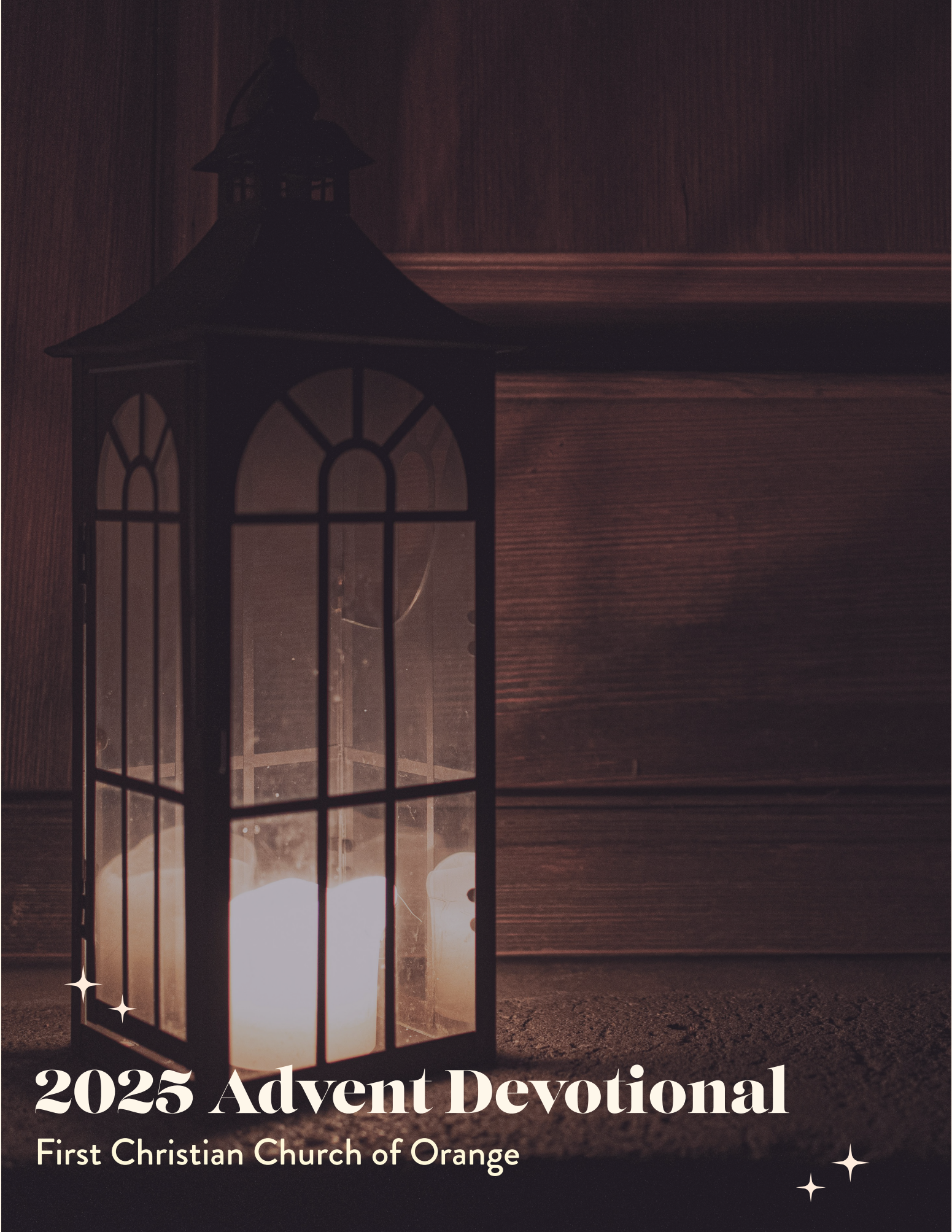




2025 Advent Devotional

First Christian Church of Orange

Rev. Beth Chiaravalle**Introduction**

Years ago, I was driving home alone on a cold, dark winter night. Rain poured down the windshield as I leaned forward, straining to see the road ahead—a mirror of my life in that season: foggy, heavy, uncertain.

Just then, a familiar song came on:

Lost and weary traveler
Searchin' for the way to go
Stranger, heavy-hearted
Longin' for someone to know
May you find a light,
May you find a light,
May you find a light to guide you home...

Sometimes the right words arrive precisely when you need them. That night, the song became a gentle blessing my heart was longing for. I let it wash over me—comforting, grounding, steadying. Over the past several years, it has become an Advent companion I return to again and again.

This year's theme is inspired by this song. "May You Find a Light" by The Brilliance captures the heartbeat of Advent. Its refrain is both blessing and invitation: that in every shadow we might discover light, and in one another we might glimpse the face of God.

Advent always comes in winter, in the long nights, in the in-between places where we wait with both longing and hope. It is not a season of standing still; it is a journey. We walk through shadows with candles in our hands, trusting that even the smallest flame can help us see. And often it is the darkness itself that teaches us to notice the light that has been there all along.

The song reminds us that light is not found by escaping darkness, but by moving through it together. Its lyrics echo the subversive message at the heart of the birth narratives: that divine light does not arrive wrapped in power or perfection, but rises among the weary, the poor, the uncertain—the everyday people simply trying to find their way home.

The devotionals that follow are filled with personal stories, spiritual insight, and honest theological reflection. Together, they remind us that faith is a shared journey—and that we never walk the road alone. I am deeply grateful for - and inspired by - the courage each contributor has shown in offering a piece of themselves.

May these sacred gifts from our beloved community be a light for you on this Advent journey.
May they stir in you hope, peace, joy, and love as you move through this season.

November 30, 2025

Rev. Dr. Dayna Kinkade
Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah 11:1-10

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

Advent is a season of waiting, but not the quiet, polite kind of waiting we practice in line at the grocery store. Advent holds the deeper waiting; the kind that aches in our bones, the kind that wonders if light will really come.

And every year, during the Advent season we turn to Isaiah. Isaiah wasn't speaking about Jesus in a literal sense. He was speaking about his world, torn by fear, threatened by empire, marked by people longing to breathe again. Yet somehow, across centuries, his poetry touches our longing. Isaiah looks at a world that feels broken and says, "Look closer. Something is stirring."

The stump may look lifeless, but stirring beneath are signs of life yet to emerge.

Isaiah helps us hold both the beauty and the ache of Advent. He reminds us that God's newness doesn't always burst onto the scene with trumpets. Sometimes it grows in secret. Sometimes it feels like hope rising from a most unlikely place.

When early Christians looked at Jesus; his compassion, his courage, his love for the overlooked, and the peaceable kingdom he proclaimed, they connected him to Isaiah's hope for Israel.

We read Isaiah in Advent because he invites us to us look for the light when everything has gone dark. We read Isaiah because he trains our eyes to seek God in unexpected places and unexpected people. We read Isaiah because his poetry refuses to give in to despair. He invites us to look at our world; this beautiful, hurting world, and speak the words, "Something is stirring."

Dear God, with the vision of Isaiah, give us hope for the coming days. May we trust that the things that make for peace are still stirring, even if we can't see where or how. As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth, stir within us. Awaken our spirits. Freshen our vision. Open our hearts to receive again, your Word, made flesh. Amen.

December 1, 2025

Micheal Holt
Matthew 4:16

Matthew 4:16 is a profound verse that captures the essence of hope and divine illumination in a world often filled with despair. This verse tells us about people living in darkness, which can be understood both literally and metaphorically. When we think about the people who were sitting in darkness, we can picture those struggling with sin, suffering, doubt, loneliness, or any form of spiritual blindness. These situations create a sense of obscurity in our lives, making it tough to find our way. However, the latter part of the verse reveals an amazing turnabout: light has dawned on them.

This light is not just any ordinary light; it represents enlightenment, salvation, and guidance from Jesus Christ, who came to the Earth to bring hope and restoration. Jesus became that light for people who were lost and searching for something greater than themselves. When Christ stepped into our lives, He provided clarity and understanding. He illuminated the paths we walk, transforming our despair into hope. This verse reassures us that no matter the darkness we find ourselves in, there is always a light ahead. It encourages us to reach out for that light and allows it to guide and transform our lives.

Exert from Christianity Path

December 2, 2025

Chie Chap
Jeremiah 33:14-16

Hope in a Dark Time

Jeremiah 33:14-16 New International Version

14 “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

15 “‘In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land

16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it[a] will be called:

The Lord Our Righteous Savior.’

Each year as the days grow shorter and the nights grow longer, I always feel a little settling, a decrease of energy, a winding down.

This year I felt the change more than usual. 2025 has brought new terrain to my life: my mother passing, caring for our father with Stage 4 Parkinson’s, a new business and navigating all that comes with that. It all seems to be catching up to me with the changing of the seasons.

I have always been a good sleeper: a deep, solid sleeper, resistant to waking up for even the most spectacular of earthquakes. But recently my sleep has been plagued with an intruder, my “monkey mind,” which I have been having trouble lulling to sleep. So I am especially drawn to our passage for this devotional.

As I understand this passage from Jeremiaah (with the help of on-line friends/scholars), preceding today’s text is the scenario that the people of Jerusalem/Judah are on the verge of attack, impending decimation, and that all will be lost. But this prophecy is a proclamation of hope: that not only will all be well, but that the line of David will flourish.

I am reminded to turn to God to find hope, especially in my time of darkness: literally, in the dark of night, as I toss and turn, and try to soothe my monkey mind. I can talk to God. And breathe. I can have faith while I wait, and trust that tomorrow all will be well. And not only tomorrow, but the day after that, and the day after that. And to make God’s Message of Hope my own: that ask will be well, and my life will flourish with new growth.

Blessings on us all through this Advent journey!

December 3, 2025

Lynda Perring
John 9:5

Scripture John 1:5

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

There is much in life that holds the threat of darkness and it would be easy to let that consume me. Personally there is the death of our son and the death of our good friend, Carol. But I'm also overwhelmed by the darkness I feel in our political situation and my uncertainty about where it will end and what I can do about it. I know for others there is darkness because of other kinds of loss, or illness, or general malaise. So this scripture reminds me that the light will ultimately prevail and I will dwell on that this Advent season.

Having said that, in my musings the last few days it occurred to me that there is also an opportunity and purpose in darkness. Literally it divides the day from the night and provides a time to rest. Metaphorically it can provide a time to reflect, self-evaluate and grow. The challenge is to find balance and to always be in touch with the promise and hope of the light.

There is so much about light this time of year – the light of the Star, the light of the promise of Jesus' birth, the light reflected in the candles in the Advent wreath. Diwali was October 21 and I looked it up to understand more about it and was lifted up by the belief of the Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs that good always triumphs over evil and light always triumphs over darkness. In addition, in this tradition, it is a time for charitable giving and selfless service. So for this season I will continue to intentionally seek and receive the light. Some of those places are through people who touch my life and who exemplify the principles of our faith and Christian teaching. Those people are both family and friends and maybe there will even be someone who touches me this season who is currently unknown to me. I will strive to be open so that I may find the light in ways not yet imagined. Maybe even in charitable giving or selfless service. And I will hold on to the image of light which cannot be overcome. At the same time I will be aware of the darkness and open to the God spirit as it may speak to me.

Prayer: Holy One, I pray for the discipline this Advent Season to focus on light as well as to listen for the still small voice of God in the darkness. Let me be aware of places where I might bring light to someone else maybe even in their darkness. I pray for each day to be one of thanksgiving for Jesus' birth and a focus on the light Jesus brought to us through his teaching and his example of how we are to live. Amen

December 4, 2025

Tom Perring
Matthew 5:16

16 In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven. (Good News Translation).

“SHINE THE LIGHT ON THE HOOK!” Dad exclaimed. We were fishing on the Salt Fork River using a trot line. This is a line that is strung across the river from which we hung some 75 hooks, each hook about 3 feet apart. During the night, we would “run” the lines, taking off fish and rebaiting the hooks with crawdads, minnows, frogs, or chicken liver. At 3am, the night time temperature and the water were pretty chilly. While Dad was in water up to his thighs, as a young boy, I was in water up to my waist, shivering, which caused the flashlight to shake... a lot! You see, my job was to shine the light on the hook so Dad could see it and put on the bait. This not only allowed him to get the bait on the hook, but also kept him from sticking his thumb with the hook. After the umpteenth time of telling me to shine the light on the hook (and perhaps sticking his thumb), he became a little more, shall we say, direct with his request. A really cool thing is that my brother, Joe, shares exactly the same story, from when he was a little boy. Now when we work together on projects, we sometimes find a situation which is perfect for that familiar phrase. What great memories of the time on the river with Dad.

As I read this scripture, I was taken back to this time of shining the light on the right thing at the right time. I alone held the light and controlled where it shined. What a great image that translates to my life, and maybe your life, today. Now, there have been times when I wasn't even sure that I had a light to shine. During these times of loss and pain, it became hard to think of myself as a shining light. Digging out of despair can be a long journey, and I certainly don't have a recipe for how to move through the darkness. A few things that come to mind are... keep going, stay connected to others, look for things to be thankful for, and pray for God's presence. And when you find that divine spark that God has placed within you, let your light shine! Do not dwell on the myriad of distractions that swirl around us like cold river water. Don't shiver. Focus your light on the things that matter...caring for others, serving those who are less fortunate, being connected to your community, striving to make a positive difference. In this way, your light will indeed shine before people and bring praise to God.

Prayer:

Oh Holy One, remind me that I hold the light, the very light that You placed within me. Help me to not be weighed down by the many distractions in our world, so that I can take control of my light, and focus it ways that uplift others, and brings all of us into a closer relationship with you.

Amen.

December 5, 2025

Natasha Corich
Matthew 8:23-27



Jesus Stills The Storm

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A wind storm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith." Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

"Jesus in the Storm" - Poem By Natasha Corich
Flowing waters like the Rivers that God created in Genesis
Raining like the floods of Noah and the Arc
Baptism water: Rebirth, renewal, dove from the sky

December 6, 2025

Jim Gabelsberg
Isaiah 2:3-5

In the beginning when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate ... Then God commanded, “Let there be light” – and light appeared. This is the beginning of a great creation story. My logic oriented engineering mind appreciates the need for an easy-to-understand story; but, questions the technical accuracy of all creation stories. There are supposedly millions of stars in the universe. Stars create energy and light by burning hydrogen and a few other nuclear reactions. Where did these come from, and how were they formed into amazingly large balls that are spread through galaxies and universes. Living organisms could not have developed without energy and light being transmitted to planets. On our Earth, light is also created by lightning, fires, fire-flies, glow-worms, ocean creatures, algae, etc.

For humans, light can both illuminate and enlighten. I believe the need to visually see our surroundings and situations is very important. Knowledge can be powerful when it enlightens us. Teachings in our Christian bible, and most other faith based writings, shed light on and provide enlightening guidance to help with the development of both personal and inter-personnel relationships. Hopefully, this also extends to our home, the Earth, created for us. During this Advent and Christmas season, let us see the light that surrounds all of creation and extend love, graciousness, generosity, compassion, etc. to everyone we encounter. Then, make a resolution to continue this practice through 2026.

December 7, 2025

BJ Reinard
Luke 1:67-80

In these verses it is revealed that John the Baptist's father, Zechariah realized that his son was to be a prophet of the Most High, God. John was to prepare the way of the Lord, Jesus. John preached to the people that God was merciful and gave them knowledge about salvation. God's saving grace was given to His people who lived hopelessly in darkness and in the fear of looming death.

John's message guided them onto the way of peace. During this season of remembrance of Jesus's coming may we also accept God's mercy and rest assured God loves us unconditionally.

Prayer:

Dear God,

Let us be mindful of your saving grace and accept the peace which can be ours. Amen

December 8, 2025

Donna Gladson
Luke 3:1-6

As it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet:
A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
Prepare the way for the Lord,
Make straight paths for him.
Every valley shall be filled in,
Every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
The rough ways smooth.
And all people will see God's salvation.

During Advent, we often think about waiting, waiting for Christmas, waiting for light to break into darkness, waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. But John the Baptist reminds us that Advent is not only a season of waiting; it is a season of preparation.

John's cry in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord!" calls each of us to make room in our hearts and lives for Christ's coming. The imagery of valleys filled, mountains made low, and rough roads smoothed paints a picture of transformation. God does not merely visit us as we are. He reshapes the landscape of our souls so that His presence can dwell with us.

The valleys may be our despair, our doubts, or our sense of unworthiness. God raises them with his mercy. The mountains might be our pride, our self-sufficiency, or our resistance to grace. God humbles them with His truth. The crooked and rough paths, our broken relationships, fears, and sins. He makes straight and smooth by His forgiveness and love.

Advent invites us to experience God's peace and allow his joy to enter our lives.

Prayer:

As we prepare lives to experience, again, the coming of the Christ child, may the mountains of our pride be leveled and the valleys of our doubt be filled. Make straight the paths of our heart so that Your love may enter freely.
Amen.

Cathy Perring
Isaiah 9:2-7

² The people walking in **DARKNESS**
have seen a great 
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a *light* has dawned.

³ You have enlarged the nation
and **increased** their joy **joy joy**;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.

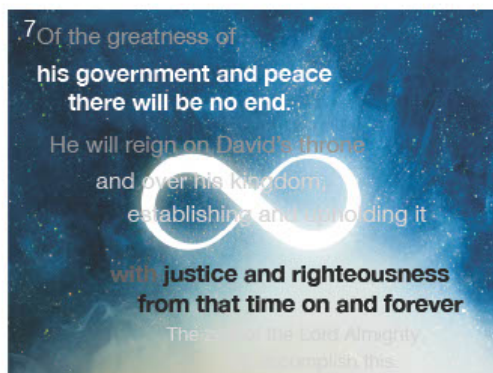
⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have **Shattered the yoke**
that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod **of their OPPRESSOR.**



⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ 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.



For me, Isaiah 9:2-7 speaks to Isaiah's vision of God's Kingdom, and his foretelling of the one who will show us the Way. As I read and reflected on this passage, words and images jumped out at me from this familiar text.

December 10, 2025

Louise Hall
Luke 1:69-79

HOPE

Welcome to winter! I don't know what the weather is like on the day you are reading this. I do know that December is unpredictable here in SoCal. But no matter what the weather is, it will be dark. Maybe we need that extra hour of darkness. I'm thinking that it may be a good time to feel gratitude, to feel a longing, and to feel mystified. Today is a good time to think about hope.

In Luke's scripture, we are reminded that long ago the Lord made some promises to his prophets. God's love and kindness will shine upon us like the sun that rises in the sky. On us who live in the dark shadow of death, this light will shine to guide us into a life of peace. (Luke 1:78-79)

These scripture verses are so descriptive. Can't you just see that sunrise, at the end of a rainstorm, when the sun takes on a magnificence. Let the next sunrise or sunset you see lead you to peace.

We are feeling our age at our house these days. We've been through a tough year together. These words comfort us, and they help to guide our conversations toward hope.

Our friend Ben Bohren has shared that one of the verses in the 23 Psalm helped him get through a time of severe health issues. "I may walk through valleys as dark as death, but I won't be afraid. You are with me, and your shepherd's rod makes me feel safe." (Psalm 23:4) What or who makes you feel safe? What helps you see the light of hope?

As we journey together through advent and celebrate the birth of Christ Jesus, I hope you use every opportunity available to you to bring hope, joy, and peace into your life. Let's gather to bring the light of hope to each other.

Blessed are we whose patience grows thinner by the day.

We who are tired of the world as it is

-in all of its heartache and loss

And hopelessness

We who want more.

More hope. More joy. More life.

"The Lives We Actually Have"

by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie

Blessings, Louise Hall

December 11, 2025

Gary Gettman

John 1:1-5

This first chapter of the Gospel of John is fundamental to our understanding of the relationship between God and us. Through Jesus we experience the transformative power of light in our world and throughout the universe. The fifth verse proclaims:

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”.

Darkness cannot displace the light of Christ. It shines and lights up even the darkest corners of our lives. For this advent season I am reminded the birth of Jesus was preceded by the light of a star shining over Bethlehem, announcing the arrival of someone who would embody a great light.

Prayer: As Christmas approaches let us draw near to the light of Christ. Let it shine on our faces and warm our hearts. May we become beacons of His light and shine it in all the dark places in the world and in the lives of others. Amen.

December 12, 2025

Cheryl Gettman
Isaiah 40:1-11

In the book of Isaiah the main idea is that despite our sins, God will come. His goal is not judgement but restoration. God has comfort and compassion for us. We simply receive this hope and comfort from God. In verses 3-5 a voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD: make straight in the desert a highway for our God”

God is coming to us in our wilderness so we must get ready. The message of this scripture in this advent season is that God will comfort us in spite of our failings and transgressions. This is the good news we must spread as we celebrate the birth of our lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Our God in heaven and among us, let us become open to God’s grace in this season of Advent. May we clear a path and make way for the coming of the Christ and receive his hope, comfort and compassion in our own lives. Amen.

December 13, 2025

Rachel Parker-Stephen

Luke 1:5-17

I remember looking around the bedroom in the dark. Pulling the covers up to my chin with shaking hands, my eyes would search every corner and shape, sure they were moving and coming to get me. Every toy and chair had new life in the dark, something evil and frightening. I would summon up what tiny courage I had and rush to the light switch all the way across the room, only to find the same happy bear and books, things I had always loved and cherished. The light's return chased away the monsters and the fear.

As I grew, I realized that light gave the world more than an escape from fear. It was a companion to clarity, giving color and shape to the world. Light is crucial to form and volume, emotion and meaning, color and contrast. It defines perception and memory. Light gives form to the hidden, unknowable things shaded by darkness. It is a miracle in and of itself.

In the dark times of political tyranny and spiritual emptiness under King Herod, an angel of light comes to announce the birth to a blameless and barren family. The light reveals that God has answered their prayers and will give them the light of their lives, a son named John. John will shine the light on his people to reveal the Light of the World, Jesus.

In these dark times of political tyranny and spiritual emptiness, the Light is a miracle, giving color, shape, and clarity to us all.

December 14, 2025

Nita Walker

John 8:12

John 8:12

*"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."*

I Am the Light of the World

By Jim Strathdee

Chorus:

I am the light of the world

You people come and follow me.

If you follow and love, you'll learn the mystery

Of what you were meant to do and be.

Verse 1:

When the song of the angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and the shepherds have found their way home,

The work of Christmas is begun!

Verse 2:

To find the lost and lonely one,

To heal that broken soul with love,

To feed the hungry children with warmth and good food,

To feel the earth below, the sky above!

Verse 3:

To free the prisoner from his chains,

To make the powerful care,

To rebuild the nations with strength and goodwill.

To call a man your brother everywhere.

Verse 4:

To bring hope to every task you do,

To dance at a baby's new birth,

To make music in an old man's heart,

And sing to the colors of the earth!

May reading the words to this song bring light and love to your heart.

May you go forth into the world with a quickening step and unbridled joy!

Dear Jesus, thank you for bringing your light and love to a dark and forbidding world.

Help us to live each day with light and love, welcoming the stranger,

giving hope to the lost, pursuing justice for the persecuted,

and spreading warmth wherever we go. Give us the strength to carry on,

even when the darkness seems impenetrable. We ask this in your holy name.

Amen

December 15, 2025

Beth Irish
Psalm 27:1

The Lord is Our light

Based on Psalm 27:1 – *“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”*

As Advent dawns, we light candles against the deepening dark of winter. Each small flame reminds us of a greater truth—that the Lord Himself is our light. Long before the star rose over Bethlehem, David sang of a God who dispels fear and drives away the shadows.

In this season of waiting, we often face uncertainty—in the world, in our hearts, in our days. Yet Advent is not about pretending the darkness isn't real; it's about trusting that the Light has already come and is coming still. Jesus, the Light of the world, shines in every place fear tries to take root.

So as we prepare room for him, may this be our prayer;

Lord, be my light when the night feels long.

Be my salvation when fear whispers loud.

Be my stronghold when I grow weary of waiting.

The darkness cannot overcome His light. Thus Advent rest in that radiant promise.

December 16, 2025

Della Gabelsberg

1 John 1:7-12

LIGHT CHANGES EVERYTHING

This morning I awoke to cold fog instead of rain. As I made coffee and watched water drops slide off of leaves on my next door neighbor's tree I shivered and waited. I waited for the coffee, I waited for the sun, I waited for the house to warm up. I waited for the day to really begin. Soon I could see my neighbor's house across the street and the rainbow reflections on my dining room table. The day had begun. The waiting was over.

John 1 is like this morning. The world was waiting. Waiting for the new beginning as promised by Isaiah, foretold by the prophets and made ready by John the Baptist. The people were waiting for the Child of God to bring light, hope, grace, and love to the world.

As disciples we are the hands and feet of Christ on the earth today. We must not wait quietly. We must continue to prepare for Christ's birth by spreading the light of Christ - hope, grace and love this advent season.

December 17, 2025

Bill Jacobs

Isaiah 60:1-3

Eugene Peterson translates Isaiah 60:1-3 as a wake-up call in his Message translation:

Get out of Bed, Jerusalem! Wake up. Put your face in the sunlight.

God's bright glory has risen for you.

*The whole earth is wrapped in darkness, all people sunk in deep darkness,
but God rises on you. God's sunrise glory breaks over you, and nations will come to your light,
kings to your sunburst brightness.*

Perhaps you've noticed. There are morning people, and there are not-morning people.

The latter group often find the early risers inexplicably joyful, and dare I say a little bit judgy. The time's-a-wasting crowd, on the other hand, shake their heads when their young adult offspring sleep the morning away, or when folks fail to realize what a gift each new day really is.

Advent may serve as a wake-up call for the church and indeed for all people. It comes as God's invitation to open our eyes and see God's light shining on us again. And this is not just a Christian idea. Many world religions consider winter solstice as a time to celebrate the light.

Who do you suppose the prophet Isaiah had in mind when he said: Arise, shine, for your light has come! Was he talking to a nation in exile who were blissfully sleeping through their years of captivity? Yes, perhaps. But some in Babylon were not just lying down but had FALLEN DOWN. In a real sense they had been HELD DOWN. It's time, he said, to RISE UP from our hope-starved bondage. Don't let anyone hold you back from the full glory of what you might do or be.

One of my favorite Advent anthems is Don Besig's arrangement of the spiritual: "Rise Up, Shepherds and Follow that Star!" The shepherds rose in the dead of night to a new light dawning, and so might we all. That is the Advent message that rings true for me: Rise up!

The season of Advent is an urgent plea for us to put our fears and failures behind us, put on our work clothes and STAND TALL in the light as God's beloved once again. The darkness we see all around us is not meant to have power over us forever. What can you do this Advent to bring the light, to carry the light?

In every way that we can, we are called not just to find the light, but to BE THE LIGHT this year.

December 18, 2025

Ethan Chap

2 Corinthians 4:6

In this passage, Paul writes about how God gives us light and that the light shines in our hearts, which allows us to see the glory of Christ. This light is not only inspiration, but is also love and compassion that God has for us. Paul calls us to let this light and love shine in our hearts so that we may know Jesus.

Though not explicitly stated in the passage, I also believe that we can and should turn that light and compassion to others. However, in order to truly love others, we must love ourselves. Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. But some people (myself included) sometimes show more love to others than we do ourselves.

When I was reflecting on this passage, I realized I must obviously love God and love others; however, I need to love myself first, then turn that love for myself. When I do this, then I can give my love and light abundantly, and others can feel the light of God as well.

December 19, 2025

Shami Espinoza

John 12:36

Some days it is extremely hard to find the light, to Believe in the Light, or to believe I am Light to others. Every news source, social media outlets and conversations focus on the negatives around us and in the world, all the ways communities are hurting. I am kept awake at night in the dark with images of brown people who look like my family members being ripped from cars, from job sites, even from schools by masked armed men. I feel helpless, I feel rage. I want to be Light! But how?

This fall in my small group we discussed the book *Cherished Belonging* by Father Gregory Boyle, he introduced me to a new term “Acatamiento” Affectionate awe. He said “we are encouraged to have this stance and be in relationship in this way with people, and especially with those on the margins, or those one has been taught to hate. By looking with affectionate awe, we learn humility, bowing to the other person, so that we are led to a point of connection that leads us to KINDNESS. Affectionate awe looks past assumptions that people are bad, or that values them just on their actions, to an understanding of the trauma and despair that led them to that point. This then gives us the ability to more fully behold the goodness in others”.

We can chose everyday to be the Light, to show Kindness, to look at each other with Acatamiento. The verse is a call to action. Jesus urging us to have Faith, TO BE LIGHT. As we Prepare this Advent Season I invite you, I urge you to find new ways to build relationships with new people, to stick up for those who look differently than you do, who worship differently. To speak boldly for those who have been silenced. To disagree and still show Grace and look to every brother and sister with Affectionate Awe!

PEACE & LIGHT

Shami Espinoza

December 20, 2025

Stephanie Picazzo
Isaiah 12:2-6

As we near 2025's darkest night and reflect on the confusion, grief, and pain endured throughout this past year, the praise song of Isaiah 12 offers us a moment to pause the suffering, renew our courage, and rejoice in the certainty that God is and will always be with us.

Wedge between passages of judgment, where the prophet Isaiah describes the proud being humbled, this song of hope reminds God's people that even in a world of mayhem and darkness, there is joy to be found through God's transformative love and mercy.

When reading the word salvation multiple times in this passage, I reflected on the first small group/book study that I participated in at FCCO. We read "The Heart of Christianity" written by the great theologian Marcus Borg and discussed the scholarly, historical-critical definition of salvation, which I learned is different from my evangelical understanding, as it is less about one's beliefs and security in the afterlife. Instead, Borg says the true understanding of the word salvation is more closely aligned with a spiritual transformation into a life and world filled with justice, compassion, and love.

The familiar verse 2 of this passage is often recalled to encourage believers to trust God and not live afraid. While those mindsets are important, it is from this deeper understanding of a transformative salvation that we find the strength to continue our work toward justice and systemic change for all creation. It is with this courage that we advocate for a better and just world. Letting go of our anxiety and fear, we can shine a light of love into the darkness and find the courage to change minds (and systems) to live without doubt, conflict, or sorrow.

Then, we sing our praise and gratitude to God - Isaiah 12, Amen.

Quick plug - If interested, you can check out most of Martin Borg's books, including The Heart of Christianity, from FCCO's Progressive Lending Library in the Fireside Room.

December 21, 2025

Dan Oliver

James 1:17

Scripture: James 1:17 (English Standard Version with an inclusive edit by Dan)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the God of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

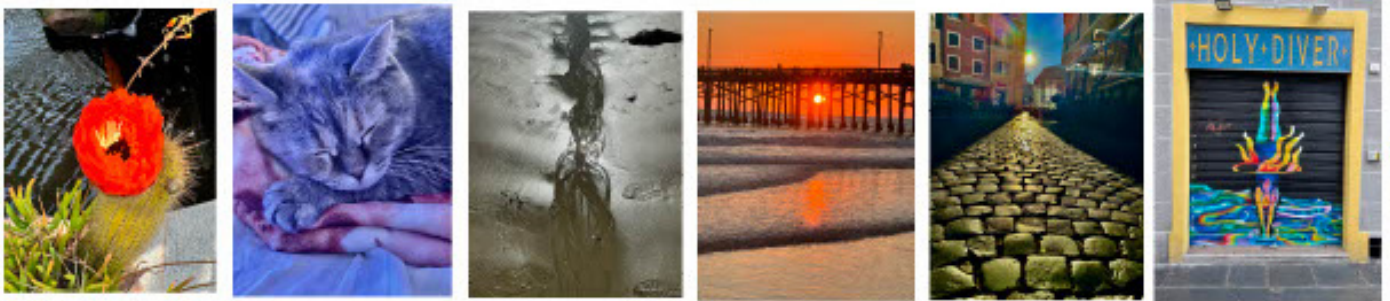
“Finding the Light” by Dan Oliver

Almost daily I find images of light in my life. Sometimes, I unexpectedly stumble upon them, and other times, they hit me like a brick. Years ago, I started capturing these images in photos. One of my earliest photos was taken when I was 16 and living in Tucson AZ. It was 5:30AM and I was driving when I saw the morning sun ascending above the Catalina foothills. Within seconds, the sun brilliantly splintered among the thick clouds and created intense beams of light. They were so vivid I felt I could reach out and touch them. This light sighting was long before cell phones, but I just happened to have a camera with me and captured what I called, “my God Shot!” Shortly after this, my mom asked for a copy of this picture which she hung in the office of every church she served. It was her daily reminder of the radiance and beauty of God’s light in her midst.

In the fifty years since my unexpected sighting of light, I have continued to seek and capture images of light. It is a personal way I remain mindful of my faith and trust in God. Now, the light I find isn’t always from the sun. I also find light in people, nature, food, and even in random things like graffiti. In addition to taking the photos, I have a file of these pictures that I can revisit whenever I need a little light in my life. Below are a few of my recent sightings.

In today’s scripture from James 1:17, we are reminded that God is a God of lights. And every good and perfect gift comes to us from our God of lights.

My prayer during this special Advent season, is that each of us will be open to finding new images of God’s light in our life. Remember, the more we look for light, the more light we will find. May the gift of God’s light overcome us all!



December 22, 2025

Stan Smith
Luke 1:39-45

Luke 1:39-45

39In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Each year we hear the music and the carols, see the trees, the candles, the lights and cards, the stockings and stars, and of course Santa Claus. And Christmas is born into our lives once again! Once a year it comes crashing into our consciousness, an unavoidable entourage. I can't help but think it is more a cultural event than a faith celebration. Don't get me wrong, I love the trappings as much as anyone. But do you think this is what Jesus would want?

Lest we forget what it is all about, it was a three year old named Joshua who put it right. His mother had a ritual of opening cards, and Josh wanted to be a part of it. So she let him open them each day, and then after looking at the front of the card, he would hand it to her and ask who it was from. Seven cards arrived one day, and they sat and went through them. The last one had a vivid picture, no obscurity or impressionist art here. Bright, clear colors - manger scene. He says, "I know what this is!" She asked, and he described it - Joseph and Mary, an angel, and the baby Jesus. Then the mother reached for the card saying, "let me see who it's from." But he held tight. "I know who it's from." "OH?" she said quizzically. And Joshua said: "It's from God!"

Caught by surprise? Just when we thought we had Christmas all wrapped up.

Jesus in the form of an infant, slays our reality right before our very eyes. I think this is what happens to Elizabeth when Mary greets her. It suddenly all comes together.

By the way, did you know that the names Jesus and Joshua are the same name linguistically? In Hebrew it is Yeshua - God saves!

Merry Christmas
Stan Smith

December 23, 2025

Barbara Post

Luke 1: 1:46-55

Sparks of Light

While at the Regional Gathering this Fall, I attended a workshop on death and grief. We talked about how often, when someone dies, they often appear to us in sparks of light. In this workshop, I thought of 3 times when I saw a spark of light near the deaths of my brother, my dad, and my mother.

My brother died at the age of nearly 8 following open heart surgery right before my senior year of high school. He started saying, "Take me home!" The medical personnel thought he meant his physical home. My mother felt he was talking to God and a spiritual home.

My parents did not let my other brother and me go in to see his body before the Memorial Service. After they saw him, they let us come in. To me, Richard looked his age. Before the surgery, he looked to me to be about six. That was my light.

When my dad died at 54, just 4 days after he was moved to a skilled nursing facility, about 2 months after his surgery. My mom told him that my husband and I would be coming the next day or on because I wasn't feeling well. Stomach flu or morning sickness. He died on Sunday morning while my mother, brother, and I were at church. My mom and a friend heard him say, "I won't be here." My son was born nine months to the day later. These two things, what my dad said and when my son was born, were my light.

When my mom died at the age of 80, she went into the hospital on Friday with pneumonia. On Saturday, they expected her to go home on Sunday. On Sunday morning, I got a call that she had been moved to the ICU and was on a respirator, which she had agreed to. I went to church to share my concern (no internet), then right to the hospital after church. She wrote on the back of my hand, telling me what to do. That was my mom telling me what to do.

On Monday morning, my brother and I went to see her after I got a call telling me her organs were shutting down. My brother called his ex-wife, and she said she would meet us at the hospital. He kept looking out the window to see if she was there. The mathematician in me kept plotting the graphs on the machine near her head. When my brother's ex got to mom's bedside, the graphs began showing her organs were failing. My lights here were her writing on my hand and her waiting for my ex sister-in-law to arrive.

The lights may come at the time of death, or before or after death. May we always be open to the Sparks of Light.

December 24, 2025

Mary Jacobs
Luke 2:8-14

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. 11 Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors."

Until I was 12 years old, my mom and dad were farmers. At night, embraced by the darkness void of light pollution, the brilliant beauty of the night sky invited us into wonder. The night covered the longing of a young child who knew how hard her parents worked and how little that provided for the living of life. Sometimes, on other nights when a full moon provided a spotlight against the deep dark of the sky, I could imagine the world aglow with Holy Good News that we mattered. I identify with the shepherds who yearned for light in their long nights. Nights, where I imagine, they felt vulnerable and uncertain about their families and themselves under the shadow of a political and economic system that didn't see or value them. Removed from the comfort and leisure that would allow them to follow the expectations of religious practice and be connected to their faith community, they found themselves pushed to the edges of that community. How they must have longed for the joyful light of belonging! How they must have dreamed of promises made about a God-blessed value! Too long had they waited for the light of hope to find them out in the darkness.

In a moment, light shifts everything. Is this the grandiose birth announcement prepared for a Roman emperor underscoring future peace and prosperity upheld by the status quo? **NO!** This is a upside down birth announcement to a raggedy band of shepherds, often forgotten by others, proclaiming the birth of a child born in a stable. The God-messengers proclaim "*wonderful, joyous news for all people*". This is a **"YES!"** to all people. This child will grow up and become **the One**

who will bring those on the edge of long nights into the daylight of God's love;
who will be shining light on the guest list for God's Kin-dom,
the poor...the overlooked...the dismissed and the devalued;
who will see and embrace us all as part of the God's KIN-dom.

I invite you to take a moment on this Christmas Eve to stand outside and gaze into the darkness:

Where do you feel like a shepherd waiting in the darkness for light?

How are you opening yourself to the mystery of this child born in Bethlehem, and where are you looking for the light God is still sending into the world and listening for the messengers bringing good news?

Who is coming alongside you to offer God's light? (Tell them thank you!)

HEY, UNTO YOU A CHILD IS BORN! Thanks be to God! Let's sing and dance and get ready to be God-light in this world.

December 25, 2025

Tim Tivenan
Luke 2:15-20

During the past year I have participated in small group studies on books written by Father Greg Boyle. The two books we read and discussed were *The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness and Cherished Belongings: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times*. Considering the current status of society, just the titles themselves drew me to these two works. Both contain ideas and concepts about our relationship to God and each other that is at times challenging and at others comforting. One thought that has stuck with me is his description of God as a “Wild One” who is ceaselessly surprising and whose care and delight in us is hugely outsized and something we struggle to comprehend. Boyle also poses that rather than being judgmental and disapproving, God is actually “on our side” and wants us to recognize that we are “unshakably good”. In defining God, Father Boyle states in the simplest terms, “God is Love”.

Father Boyle’s teachings link very closely to our Advent theme of “Find the Light” along with the Scripture from Luke 2:15-20. Too often we focus on the mistakes, failures, and shortcomings of our faith. I find “light” in the awareness that the Greatness of God lies in the belief that he will always love me, and he is “on my side” regardless of my flaws. The passage from Luke describes the awe filled and joyful reactions of both Mary and the Shepherds to Christ’s birth. This was their “light” and demonstration of God’s love for them and all of us by sending Jesus who would later model how to express our “unshakable goodness” to each other. Over and over again God has shown us we are “cherished belongings” and even in the darkest of times, that is a belief that comforts and guides me.

