

TRINITY METHODIST CHURCH

2022
*Advent
Study Guide*



Daily Meditations & Prayers
FROM
Sunday 27th November
TO
Sunday 25th December

Bill Higgs

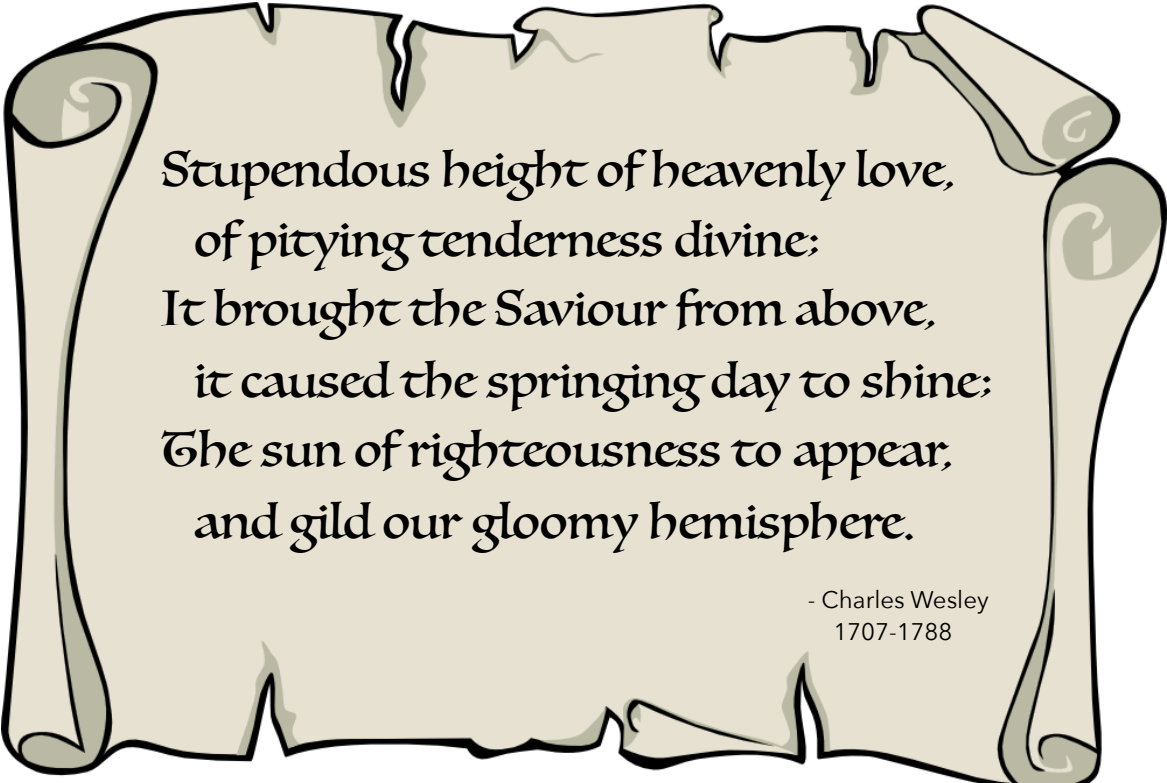
ADVENT

The word 'Advent' is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming," which is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*. Scholars believe that during the 4th and 5th centuries in Spain and Gaul, Advent was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians at the January feast of Epiphany, the celebration of God's incarnation represented by the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus (Matthew 2:1), his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (John 1:29), and his first miracle at Cana (John 2:1). During this season of preparation, Christians would spend 40 days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for this celebration; originally, there was little connection between Advent and Christmas.

By the 6th century, however, Roman Christians had tied Advent to the coming of Christ. The "coming" they had in mind was not Christ's first coming in the manger in Bethlehem, but his second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world. It was not until the Middle Ages that the Advent season was explicitly linked to Christ's first coming at Christmas.

Today, the season of Advent lasts for four Sundays leading up to Christmas. At that time, the new Christian year begins with the twelve-day celebration of Christmastide, which lasts from Christmas Eve until *Epiphany* on January 6th. Advent begins on the Sunday that falls between November 27th and December 3rd each year.

- from christianity.com



Stupendous height of heavenly love,
of pitying tenderness divine;
It brought the Saviour from above,
it caused the springing day to shine;
The sun of righteousness to appear,
and gild our gloomy hemisphere.

- Charles Wesley
1707-1788

Advent is the time of expectation... of preparation...
to anticipate Christ's coming in glory,
and to remember His coming as a baby.

In Christ God's love is made manifest:

*"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."* (John 3:16 NKJV)

Each day of Advent 2022 we will consider some aspect of how the Messiah
-- the one who came as a Baby and will come again as a King --
transforms people with the Light
of God's Truth and Love and Grace.



I am the Light of the world.

Jesus of Nazareth (John 8:12)

At the end of each week we will focus on one of the popular hymns
that celebrate the Good News of Advent and Christmas.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Genesis 1:1-5

Light is crucial to life as we know it on this planet. It is essential for everyone and for everything to have light... we would die without it. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the first thing God created was *light*!

And to stress how significant Light is, God reminds us at the end that He is the source of eternal light. In the description of the New Jerusalem given in chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation, we are told (in 22:5) that

*They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun,
for the Lord God will give them light.*

So, from beginning to end... first to last... God brings us light. All through the Bible "light" is used:

- as a metaphor for enlightenment and learning (e.g. Ephesians 5:8-10)
- as confidence in God's power (e.g. Psalm 27:1)
- as a symbol of God's Word (e.g. Psalm 119:105)
- as evidence that we are in a right relationship with God (e.g. 1 John 1:5-7)
- as proof that God is in Christ (see John 1:4-5; 1 John 1:5; John 8:12)



PRAYER

Lord, give us more of your Light, that we might see more clearly how you want us to live.
Strengthen us to shine brightly as beacons of your love and grace.
May Jesus, the Light of the world, be seen in us.
We pray for his love's sake. Amen.

Get the Christmas spirit as you listen to the wonderful song:

"Jesus, the Light of the World"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yb3UccwVns>

DAY 2 2nd Day of Advent Monday 28th November

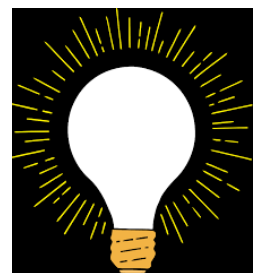
Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

Exodus 10:21-23

This is one of the ten plagues that was visited upon Egypt, as God tried to persuade Pharaoh to let His people go -- the Plague of Darkness. And this one almost worked. After three days of darkness had passed, Pharaoh 'summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind"' (Ex. 10:24). But Moses refused to go without the animals, so "the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go" (Ex. 10:25-27).

While some of the other plagues may have caused more physical disruption and inconvenience to the Egyptians, this Plague of Darkness made them realize just how important light is. The restrictions imposed by the darkness (they couldn't see each other, and couldn't move around) severely interrupted their life, playing havoc with their daily routine. If this is the result of darkness in the physical world, how much more are we affected in the spiritual realm?

We need the light of God's presence to empower us -- we are told in Scripture that it is "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Applying this truth specifically to Jesus, the Apostle John declares: "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" (John 1:4-5).



PRAYER

Teach us, our Father, that if we nourish within ourselves those things that turn us away from the light, we shall spend our years stumbling through the darkness. Teach us, our Father, that if we be true to the light that is within us, we shall become like Thee, and to become like Thee is the be-all and end-all of our desiring.

- from *The Growing Edge* by Howard Thurman*

“Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning. In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that shields the ark of the covenant law, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before the Lord from evening till morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.

Exodus 27:20-21

God institutes this “lasting ordinance” among the Israelites -- they are to ensure that the lamps in the Tabernacle are kept lit “from evening to morning”. This was a visual reminder of God’s presence with them when they settle for a while and set up the Tabernacle, just as when they are travelling. God gave visual reminders of His presence and His guidance: *“By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.* (Exodus 13:21).

This reminder of God’s presence, symbolized by light, is still celebrated by the Jews in the holy day **Hanukkah**, also known as the ‘Festival of Lights’. This came about (after the Old Testament period) when the Maccabees led a revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, who had desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. When the priest went to light the lamp the first evening afterward, there was only enough oil to last one night. They lit the lamp and prayed for God’s blessing. Miraculously the lamp stayed lit for eight days! Now they light 8 candles in a menorah, for the eight days, plus 1 for God, the Light.

The central metaphor of all religious belief — revealing light — now blots out all the imperial intrigues and internecine warfare. And that may be the greatest miracle of Hanukkah: the transformation of that oldest and darkest of human activities, war, into a feast of illumination.

- excerpt from 'What is Hanukkah?' - <https://amp.washingtontimes.com>

PRAYER

So keep us and strengthen us by your grace that no disobedience and no weakness and no failure may stop us from entering into the blessedness which awaits those who are faithful in all the changes and the chances of life down even to the gates of death; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- William Barclay *



*"To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless,
to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd.
You save the humble but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.
You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light.*

2 Samuel 22:26-29

These words are some of the lyrics of the song David sang to the Lord "when the Lord delivered him from his enemies and from the hand of Saul" (2 Sam. 22:1). David, the singer and musician that he was, often celebrated victories with songs... this occasion was no exception. He says many things about God in this long song of 50 verses, but here we focus on David's declaration that the Lord is his **lamp**, who turns David's darkness into **light**.

We note that David does not deny that he has experienced darkness. In fact, he affirms it, because he declares that God turns his darkness into light. Using the metaphor of light eliminating darkness David is celebrating God's power to enlighten, to guide, and to transform. In the same way we can experience God at work through Christ in our lives:

- **He enlightens us**

"I am the light of the world," says Jesus, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12).

- **He guides us**

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
(Matthew 6:33).

- **He transforms us**

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).



PRAYER

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory; Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire; Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy... send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light.

- Graham Kendrick

I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true.
I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live
by the light that I have.

I must stand with anybody that stands right,
stand with them while they are right,
and part from them when they go wrong.

- Abraham Lincoln

These are the last words of David:

"The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse, the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, the hero of Israel's songs:

"The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.

The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me 'When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth.'

2 Samuel 23:1-4

Here King David, in his last words, expresses the real value of leadership -- which is to be "like the light of morning at sunrise"... to be "like the brightness after rain." This was the revelation God gave him, and reflecting on this as he nears the end of his leadership role, he appreciates the value of '**light**' that is revealed in ruling in "righteousness" and "in the fear of the God."

Can you remember people who have been that kind of 'light' for you? Maybe a Sunday Schools teacher, or a Youth Leader. Maybe a teacher or a coach or some other adult who took an interest in you. A friend who can be honest with you about your values, your attitudes, your behaviour? And are you being such a 'light' to others? Mentoring a younger person... guiding/encouraging someone, praying for those who are struggling... What kind of 'light' can we bring to shine in their 'darkness'?

We don't have to be perfect to help others, and to help ourselves. David certainly was not perfect! He had his faults, his failures, his weaknesses... but as "a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22) he responded to God's call to be a leader. He was gifted to guide, encourage and help others. When we get our hearts right, we can truly shine!

PRAYER

Allow the strength of God to sustain you,
The wisdom of God to instruct you,
The hand of God to protect you,
The shield of God to defend you,
The Son of God to redeem you,
Until by the grace of God,
We see him face to face. Amen.

- E. Lee Phillips +



Different kinds of lights -- all shine!

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him
who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

1 Peter 2:9

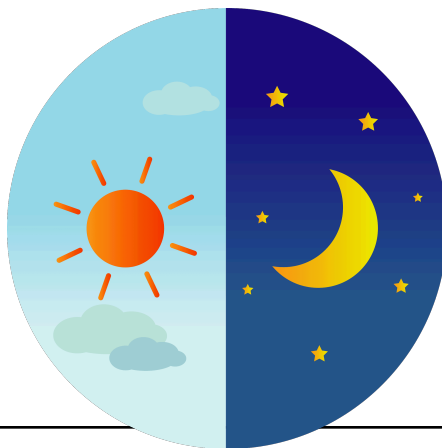
This declaration by Peter that those who follow Christ are "God's special possession" also gives the reason for being so -- it is to "declare the praises of God." God is described as the One *who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light!* Some versions of the Bible describe it as a "marvellous light" or an "amazing light" while **The Message** puts it like this: *"tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you."*

This transformation, from darkness to light, speaks of the changes that God brings into our lives... changes in our:

- ~ **VALUE SYSTEM** -- *"whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,
Phil. 4:8 whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable —
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things."*
- ~ **ATTITUDE** -- *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by
Rom. 12:2 the renewing of your mind."*
- ~ **BEHAVIOUR** -- *"let your light shine before others, that they may see your good
Matt.. 5:16 deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

*The people walking in
darkness have seen
a great light.*

Isaiah 9:2



*God is light;
in him there is no
darkness at all.*

1 John 1:5b

PRAYER

Lord, be our guiding light, showing us the way to walk in the paths of righteousness. Be our wisdom, guiding our decisions and our actions so that they are in sync with your will. Shine brightly within us, that your grace may be seen shining through us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

HYMN 256 “There’s a Light upon the mountains”

written by Henry Burton, 1840-1930

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwaI>

Henry Burton was born in Swannington, Leicestershire, England, on 26th November 1840. As a young man Burton went with his family when they emigrated to the USA in 1856. They settled in Wisconsin, and Henry studied at Beloit College, then fairly new (founded 1846). He became a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and was in charge of a church at Monroe, Wisconsin, for a short time. He then returned to Britain: he was ordained into the Wesleyan Methodist ministry (1865), serving in various circuits, mainly in Lancashire and London. He retired through ill health in 1904.

This hymn is from Burton's 'Wayside Songs of the Inner and Outer Life' (published in 1883). According to Wesley Milgate ('Songs of the People of God,' 1982, p. 98), this hymn on Christ's coming in glory appeared in American books before British ones (Burton lived in the USA for most of his early life). In Britain it has been particularly popular with Methodists, since its first appearance in the 'Wesleyan Methodist School Hymnal' (1911). There were five stanzas (as in our Hymnbook), though in the video they sing only three.

Andrew Pratt*, reflecting on this hymn, says:

"For me this hymn is a contradiction. The language is archaic and I have striven to write hymns in contemporary language. Some of it seems whimsical but perhaps that's the wrong word. I wonder if mystical suits it better. Don Saliers, an American hymnologist, has suggested that hymns enable us to sing and experience, to embody perhaps, feelings and faith which if we simply read, or said them, we would find hard to own. That's where this hymn 'works' for me.

Here we are, just a short way into Advent, looking forward to the celebration of the coming of light into the world, eternal light. The painting of Jesus with a lantern, standing outside a closed door, by Holman Hunt, comes to mind. We are waiting for that King to enter again into our realm. Henry Burton uses such evocative words which summon up, not just what we imagine, but what we are

actually feeling, children in our hearts, waiting for Christmas, 'a hush of expectation'. We could be lulled into sentimentality. But the Christ we await is 'breaking down the barriers', 'calling for his angels to build up the gates of day'. And we are still in some mystical, imaginary mode. Again the text twists and catches us unaware. We are the angels, the messengers, being called 'For the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of **our** love'. Those words 'our love', bring us up short. And from here there is only one way to go, onward and upward. 'We hear a distant music' and we are already moving in our hearts if not literally, that we might bring 'all [our] finest and [our] noblest for the triumph of our King!' Words and tune will carry us here, from a mystical imaginary beginning to the reality of commitment and the self-offering of love.

Let us pray:

Our God, who looked not from a distance, but came as light to live among us, as we feel in our hearts and sing with our lips, may we live in our lives. Amen

- Andrew Pratt

www.hymnsocietygbi.org.uk/2021/03/theres-a-light-upon-the-mountains-andrew-pratt/

WORD SEARCH -- All Things Light

Put a line through, or a circle around, the words listed below. They may be horizontal, vertical or diagonal, forward or backward.

BEAM	RAY
BRIGHT	SHINE
CANDLE	SUN
DAWN	WARM
DAYLIGHT	WICK
EMBER	
FIRE	
FLAME	
GLOW	
HALO	
HOT	
LAMP	
LIGHTHOUSE	
MOON	
OIL	

A	L	I	G	H	T	H	O	U	S	E	B
R	X	G	K	A	T	N	R	P	H	R	E
Z	E	C	L	L	O	U	T	M	I	A	A
N	I	B	A	O	Q	S	O	G	N	Y	M
W	A	R	M	I	W	O	H	V	E	Z	J
A	N	T	P	E	K	T	I	R	J	U	C
D	O	E	S	T	H	G	I	L	Y	A	D
E	L	D	N	A	C	F	L	A	M	E	W

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

*When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried,
“The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”*

(1 Kings 18:36-39)

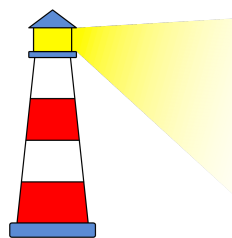
Elijah was having a rough time. He felt discouraged and defeated, nevertheless he followed God’s instructions. Although he felt outnumbered by his enemies, he was still obedient to God. He challenged king Ahab, who had “abandoned the Lord’s commands and followed the Baals” (verse 18). He also challenged queen Jezebel and her god Asherah, summoning the prophets of Baal and Asherah to a showdown (verse 19). He declared he was the only prophet of the Lord left... which was not true, as God would reveal to him in the next chapter.

The showdown on Mt. Carmel was a demonstration of power -- not the power to build an altar and to provide a sacrifice... the prophets did that. But the power to send the fire to burn the sacrifice. We may also understand this as a metaphor for the one who has the power to bring light into our situations of darkness.

The message here is a simple one: We must obey -- build the altars, make the sacrifices... God will send the fire! We must do our part with the confidence that it is God who provides the light.

I am a lighthouse, a shining and bright house
Out in the waves of a stormy sea.
The oil of the Spirit keeps my lamp burning,
Jesus, my Lord, is the light in me.

- Graham Kendrick



PRAYER

Lord, fill us with Your
light, that all may see
Your truth and love
and grace shining
through us. Amen.

DAY 9 9th Day of Advent Monday 5th December

From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today. "But now, for a brief moment, the Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage.

(Ezra 9:7-8)

Ezra is writing during the time of the exile in Babylon, and in this passage he refers to "the remnant" which the Lord has graciously given. These are the ones who shall return to their homeland of Judah, in particular to the capital city, Jerusalem. This experience of return and 'rebirth' is described by Ezra as God giving the exiled Israelites "a firm place in his sanctuary" and "relief in our bondage." The metaphor he chose to illustrate this is that "God gives **light** to our eyes."

Have you ever been "in exile"? Removed from that which is familiar and comfortable, you have to adjust to changing situations. Haven't we all just been through one of these experiences? Surely COVID 19 was a kind of exile... we had to pivot and make adjustments due to major changes that affected our daily routines. We all needed some "light" to shine in that dark experience... we all needed "light" to find our way out of the darkness. This is how Ezra understands God at work in our lives: in the darkest of times "God gives light to our eyes" so that we are not kept in exile or in bondage.

"It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness" is a Chinese proverb meaning better to do something about a problem than just complain about it. Further, a candle is a small answer to a large problem, but it is still a worthy step in the right direction, rather than just bemoaning the problem (of darkness).

The tribute paid by Adlai Stevenson to Eleanor Roosevelt when the former First Lady died in November 1962 was: "She would rather light a candle than curse the darkness, and her glow has warmed the world."

(from linkedin.com)

PRAYER

Lord, give us more of Your light, so that our spiritual eyes are opened. Help us to carry our candles into the world, for all to see. Amen.



Listen this song, and recommit yourself to carry your candle...

'Go Light Your World'

by Kathy Troccoli

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVqR6kTu8IE>

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day." (Nehemiah 4:21-22)

Nehemiah, like Ezra, lived during the time of the exile -- he was in Babylon serving as cupbearer (wine-taster) to king Artaxerxes when he heard reports of how bad things were back in Judah. He prayed that God would help him get resources to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and its gates by softening the heart of the king. God did so, and Nehemiah went to Jerusalem with not only the blessing of king Artaxerxes, but also with soldiers and authorizations for the procurement of materials. Once he got there, surveyed the damage, and developed a plan, he then had to convince others to help him in the project. Not everyone was supportive, but most were, and the work got off to a good start.

The naysayers were persistent and garnered support, and the criticism and opposition became a real threat to progress. This is when Nehemiah introduced a new strategy: half the men worked laying stones and building the wall, while half the men served as security guards, armed with spears, to keep the opposition from doing any damage during the day while they had light to work. And he had "every man and his helper" stay inside Jerusalem at night so they could "serve as guards by night and workers by day." Smart.

We too need to guard our work while building the kingdom of God. We cannot afford to let others tear down what we are building because we are not watchful and alert to the threats and the dangers. While you're building, have someone hold a 'spear' for you... and you can hold a 'spear' for someone else to build. Remember, **prayer** is one of the most effective 'spears' we have!

PRAYER

Father, we pray through Your Spirit for those who do not know You and have no interest in living your way. We pray for a world which is bleeding and aching, fighting and starving, cruel and vulnerable. We pray for the hurting and hating, for the damaged and deluded, for the ruthless and the wretched. Father, through Your Spirit we pray for those we love and cherish, and those we have to work at loving. We thank you for the flow of Your love which fills our lives with colour and joy. Lord, prompt us by Your Spirit to do Your will. Amen. ❖

DAY 11. 11th Day of Advent Wednesday 7th December

As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

(John 9:4-5)

Here Jesus reminds us that Nehemiah's strategy was good and effective. We can only work when we can 'see' the work we are doing -- hence Jesus' call to "work while it is day." This should not be understood literally, that we can only work for Jesus, building the kingdom of God, during daylight hours. Rather, it means that our work is only effective when we are enlightened, when our 'eyes of faith' are open and when we opportunities to serve.

When "the night" comes and "no one can work" is Jesus' way of encouraging us to use the opportunities we have, because they will not always be there. This is true in all of life, but especially true in our spiritual lives... **carpe diem**: we have to seize the day!

In the poem "Persevere" from the Royal Reader, set to music by Phil Stubbs, we are reminded of this truth in a different way:

*Drive the nail aright, boy, hit it on the head,
strike with all your might, boy, while the iron's red.
When you've work to do, boy, you must do it with a will...
they who reach the top, boy, must first climb the hill.*

Let's embrace the opportunities we have... let's "work while it is day" so we'll have no regrets when the "night comes" and no one can work.

PRAYER

Teach me, good Lord:

Not to murmur at multitude of business or shortness of time.
Not to magnify undertaken duties by seeming to suffer under them, but to treat all as liberties and gladness.

Not to call attention to crowded work, or petty fatigues.

Not to gather encouragement from appreciation by others, lest this should interfere with purity of motive.

Not to seek praise, respect, gratitude, or regard from superiors or equals on account of age or past service.

Not to let myself be placed in favourable contrast with another.

For Christ's sake. Amen

from *Prayers Public and Private* by Edward White Benson ✱



Candles are such an important part of our Advent and Christmas worship and celebration, for the flames remind us that the "Light of the World" has come!

*“May the day of my birth perish, and the night that said, ‘A boy is conceived!’
That day — may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it;
may no light shine on it.*

(Job 3:3-4)

Job is downcast and in despair, so depressed by his suffering and sacrifice that he decries the day he was born! We can hardly blame him... he has suffered so much, and lost so much, and is hurt so deeply that he can't see any light beyond his struggle. That is how he describes it: the darkness of doubt, hopelessness, and defeat are so overwhelming and overpowering that they make the day of his birth (when it all started) “turn to darkness”! He wishes it had never happened, since God doesn't seem to care about it.

Job knows that the darkness of his experience can only be overcome by the light of God's grace, but if God doesn't care... it's hopeless. “May no light shine on it” is how Job describes his situation, condemning himself to the ‘darkness’ that is enveloping him.

Andrae Crouch, reflecting on times of suffering and difficulty, says:

I thank God for the mountains, and I thank Him for the valleys,
I thank Him for the storms He brought me through;
For if I'd never had a problem I wouldn't know that God could solve them,
I'd never know what faith in God could do!

And John Newton, reflecting on the suffering and problems he caused, says:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now I'm found... was blind but now I see.

Happily, Job gets through his valley 'of the shadow of death'... after he repents, and prays for his friends (Job 42:6, 10), God proves His goodness and grace: “The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part” (Job 42:12).

PRAYER

Gracious heavenly Father, from whom every goodness flows, all light emanates, and all life-centering peace comes; look with mercy upon us as we worship Thee. With steadiness of attention, resolve of heart and clarity of thought, enable us to be edified in an encounter with the living Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. Through Thy Spirit convict us of our transgressions and by Thy power make us clean and whole again, and we will be whole indeed. Amen. +

*He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings utter darkness into the light.
He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them.
He deprives the leaders of the earth of their reason; he makes them wander in a trackless
waste. They grope in darkness with no light; he makes them stagger like drunkards.*
(Job 12:22-25)

In the midst of his troubles and trials, Job does see a little further than his personal suffering... here in these verses he acknowledges that God deals with nations as well as individuals. And, again, he uses the metaphor of 'light' versus 'darkness' to describe it. God "reveals darkness" and brings "utter darkness into light" and God can also do the opposite -- he can make leaders, deprived of their reason, stagger as they "grope in darkness with no light".

No wonder, then, that when God promised the Messiah, He declared to Israel:
Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but
the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to
your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

For Israel, as a nation, God promises:

The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon
shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be
your glory. (Isaiah 60:19)

This is what we all need -- individually as well as collectively -- to have in us the
'light' of God, and to let that 'light' shine through us to enlighten, empower and
influence those around us.

PRAYER

Lord, we confess we often carry to excess
our reactions to the stress we feel. Then
through rationalization, we justify
overindulgence. Discouragement tempts us
to despair; anger, to depression;
tension, to anxiety;
bereavement, to withdrawal;
incapacitation, to self-pity;
rejection, to loneliness.
Lead us to trust Thee enough to be done
with our pitiful excesses of faithlessness.
Amen. +

Jesus bids us shine,
then, for all around;
Many kinds of darkness
in the world are found --
Sin, and want and sorrow;
so we must us shine,
You in your small corner
and I in mine.

- Susan Warner



HYMN 122 "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning"

written by Reginald Heber, 1783-1826

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLwAcjuHZ_w

"Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning" was written by Bishop Reginald Heber (1783-1826), one of the finest Romantic hymn writers. Heber was born into a family of wealth and position. He was bright and a diligent student of the Bible, even at a young age, as was evidenced by his Latin studies at age seven, translating a classical Latin text into English. Heber entered Oxford at 17 and soon won two prizes for poetry.

He took orders in the Anglican Church in 1807 and became a rector in his father's church in the village of Hodnet near Shrewsbury. During his 16 years at this parish, he took on the task of improving hymn singing in the congregation. When he arrived, they were still singing only metrical psalms. He couldn't find the hymns he wanted, especially those that would fit the Anglican liturgy and the requirements of the Book of Common Prayer.

Heber decided to prepare his own hymnal and invited other poets to contribute, including Sir Walter Scott and Henry Milman. Hymn singing was not firmly established in the Anglican Church at this time, and the bishop of London refused Heber's request to publish a hymnal. "Brightest and Best" was thus first published in the Christian Observer in November 1811 before his wife Amelia Heber published it in 1827 as Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Service of the Church Year. Heber's most famous hymn is "Holy, Holy, Holy" (No. 36 in our Hymnbook).

In 1823 Heber was appointed the Bishop of Calcutta. He was known for his tireless labor, enthusiasm and administrative abilities. He died prematurely in 1826 in India on a trip to Trichinopoly, epitomizing what British hymnologist J.R. Watson calls "the dedicated missionary-bishop, giving his life for the furtherance of the gospel."

Images of light, a dominant theme of the Advent and Epiphany season, pervade the hymn's first stanza: "brightest," "morning," "dawn," "star" and "horizon." The "Star of the East" that once guided the magi now guides us to "where our infant Redeemer is laid."

The second stanza begins with strikingly Romantic images:

Cold on his cradle the dew-drops are shining,
Low lies his head with the beasts of the stall:
Angels adore him in slumber reclining,
Maker and Monarch and Savior of all.

The “cold” and “low” estate with the “beasts of the stall” in the first two lines is placed in antithesis to the “angels” who adore the “Maker and Monarch” (a beautiful example of alliteration) and the “Savior of all.”

The third stanza uses the device of two rhetorical questions. We are following the “Star of the East” with the magi and are asked about what gifts we have to offer:

Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,
Odors of Edom and offerings divine?
Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,
Myrrh from the forest or gold from the mine?

The fourth stanza brings in a different theme. Unlike the magi, we have no opulent gifts to offer.

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
Vainly with gifts would his favor secure,
Richer by far is the heart’s adoration,
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

The final line of this stanza can be looked at in at least two ways. On the one hand, the mention of the “prayers of the poor” indicates that regardless of our station in life, we have something more valuable than the wealth of the magi of history or today: “the heart’s adoration.”

This hymn was written early in Heber’s career, before he knew his ministry would take him to the poverty of India to serve in the East. Bishop Heber, described by hymnologist Albert Bailey as “the darling of fortune,” died among the poor of Calcutta.

The final stanza repeats the first exactly, providing bookends to one of the classic hymns of the season.

- C. Michael Hawn

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-hymn-honors-christ-child-as-the-brightest-and-best>

*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?*
(Psalm 27:1)

Many people, and almost all children, are afraid of the dark. Not being able to see means we don't know what's there... we aren't aware of our surroundings... we can't find our way. When light is present, dispelling darkness, then we can see and we are not afraid. In the spiritual sense that is also true, which is why the Psalmist declares that the Lord is his **light** and **salvation** -- the Lord shows the way and makes the way. Therefore there is no need to fear.

Similarly in Psalm 23, David declares: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil" (verse 4). He is not afraid because the Lord is with him, to enlighten, to guide, to direct.

This is why the classic battles between good and evil are often portrayed in images of light and darkness. The dark side often represents the evil or negative, with the light side being the opposite. A good example is 'Star Wars', where the imagery and optics are so obvious: Darth Vader and those clothed in black are the 'bad guys' while the Jedi and those in white garb are the 'good guys'! And even the weapons... the **light sabres** are the powerful weapons of the Jedi, and so their enemy has a black-bladed one they call 'Darksaber'.

The Bible also depicts the battle for humanity in terms of light and darkness: Jesus is the "light of the world" (John 8:12) and His followers are "children of the light" (Philippians 2:15). When Jesus is introduced in the first chapter of the gospel of John, He is presented as a "life that brought light to his people" (v. 4) and, as far as His mission is concerned, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out" (verse 5). Jesus is on the winning side!

PRAYER

Lord, help us to always choose the light, and not stumble and grope in the darkness. Dispel our fear as your light dispels the darkness of doubt and uncertainty. Help us to stay close to You, that Your light may shine on us, in us, and through us. We pray for your love's sake. Amen.



Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. (Psalm 43:3-4)

an excerpt from A Mother's Way by Temple Bailey ✿

The young mother set her foot upon the path of life. "Is the way long?" "Yes," her Guide said, "and the way is hard. You will be old before you reach the end of it. But--" He stopped to smile warmly. "The end will be better than the beginning."

The young mother was so happy, though, that she could not believe anything could be better than these early years. She played with her children, and gathered flowers for them along the way, and bathed them in the clear streams. The sun shone on them and life was good, and the young mother cried, "Nothing will ever be lovelier than this."

Then night came, and storm, and the path was dark. The children shook with fear and cold, and the mother drew them close, covering them with her mantle. The children said, "O mother, we are not afraid when you are near."

Then morning came, and there was a hill ahead. The children climbed and grew weary... but the mother kept encouraging them. When they reached the top, they said, "We could not have done it without you, Mother." And the mother said, "This is a better day than the last. My children have learned fortitude in the face of difficulty. Yesterday I taught them courage, today I have taught them strength."

With the next day came strange clouds that darkened the earth--clouds of war and hate and evil. The children groped and stumbled. The mother said, "Look up. Lift your eyes past the blackness to the Light." The children looked up and saw an Everlasting Glory above the strange clouds. It guided them and brought them through the darkness and evil. That night the mother said, "This is the best day of all, for I have helped my children learn to see God."

PRAYER

Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom; Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home; Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see the distant scene...
One step enough for me.

- John Henry Newman (Hymn 612)



*I am under vows to you, my God; I will present my thank offerings to you.
For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before God in the light of life.*
(Psalm 56:12-13)

The hymn ***Walk In The Light*** (No. 631 in our Hymnbook) captures the thrust of this Psalm... God has delivered our feet from stumbling -- removed the darkness -- so that we may "walk before God" -- the way to do that is "in the light of life."

Bernard Barton, who wrote this hymn was often called 'The Quaker Poet.' He was born in a Quaker family in London, January 31, 1784... He wrote ten volumes of poems... about twenty of Barton's hymns have found their way into use. The theme of this one is very dear to all members of the Society of Friends (the Quakers), who lay so much stress upon "the inner light." ●

The verses express the confidence we can have "When we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word" (1st line of Hymn 516). Each verse begins with the command: "Walk in the light" and then, as a result, what you will discover:

Verse 1... "so shalt thou know that fellowship of love" that can only come from the Spirit of Him "who reigns in light above."

Verse 2... "thou shalt find thy heart made truly His... in whom no darkness is."

Verse 3... "and thou shalt own thy darkness passed away
because that light has on thee shone..."

Verse 5... "and thine shall be a path, though thorny, bright;
for God, by grace, shall dwell in thee, and God himself is light."



PRAYER

Lord, help us to always choose the light, and not stumble and grope in the darkness. Dispel our fear as your light dispels the darkness of doubt and uncertainty. Help us to stay close to You, that Your light may shine on us, in us, and through us.
We pray for your love's sake. Amen.

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.
I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.*
(Psalm 119:105-106)

Psalm 119 is the longest book in the Bible, and is "an acrostic poem, the stanzas of which begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet; moreover, the verses of each stanza begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet." (*Quoted from footnote a. in New International Version, where you can see the Hebrew letters as a heading of each section*).

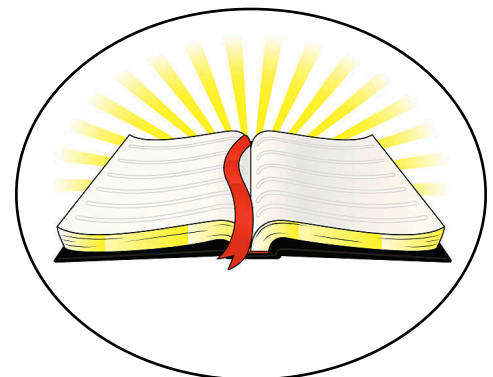
The entire Psalm speaks about God's instruction to His people, using words like **statutes, precepts, decrees, commands, laws, ways, word**. These verses quoted above come from the beginning of the stanza **Nun** (verses 105-112), and the Psalmist describes the instructions of God as a lamp and a light to illuminate the path he must travel, and admits he has taken an oath to follow these instructions. The rest of the stanza is a declaration of the Psalmist's commitment to following God's righteous laws and being faithful in keeping God's decrees.

We, too, should find God's word enlightening, giving us clear direction for life. The Word of God may come in different ways from different sources... while the Psalmist was undoubtedly referring to the Law that was given through Moses, we know that God reveals His will in other ways. Jesus told the devil, when he was being tempted in the wilderness, that we must follow "every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Those words may be from Scripture, or through a sermon, or via prayers... maybe we are inspired by nature, or encouraged by someone's victories, or lifted by childlike faith.

God can instruct us, guide us, encourage us, uplift our spirits, strengthen our faith, renew our minds... all through His words, however they come. They will always be a means of enlightenment and empowerment.

PRAYER

The grace, peace, and love of the triune God protect, defend, and empower you to stand in the tempests, walk through the storms, and abide in the light; through the victorious faith found in the regnant Christ. Amen. +



*"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,
to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon
those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:6-7)*

Biblical scholars have identified four passages in the second part of Isaiah (chapters 40-55) as "songs" that celebrate the sacrificial life of a righteous servant of God. The "songs" which are found in Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12, are usually applied to Jesus, as the Messiah who came to fulfill the role of the Suffering Servant.

The verses quoted above follow the first of these "Servant Songs" of Isaiah, and describe how he will relate to people. Through this Servant the covenant God has with his people will be continued and strengthened, and this Servant will extend the offer of a special relationship with God to the Gentiles.

This relationship which will be made possible through the new covenant, is described in metaphors of "light" and the opening of "eyes that are blind." It is further described as a liberation which will "free captives from prison" and "release from the dungeon" those who sit in darkness (i.e. enlighten them).

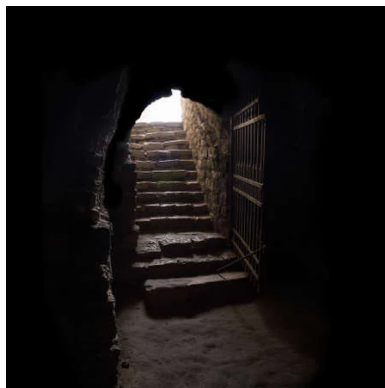
Jesus identified with this role when he declared in the synagogue in Nazareth (see Luke 4:14-21) that the passage he read was "fulfilled in their hearing." He read from Isaiah 61:1:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free...

The Servant suffers so that we can be set free, so that our blind eyes of faith can see, so that God's light can shine in the dark times and places of our world.

PRAYER

Gracious God, shine
the light of Your
glory in our eyes,
the light of Your
peace in our minds,
the light of Your love
in our hearts. Amen.



*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray--
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light:
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

- Charles Wesley
Hymn 371, v. 4

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.
Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
(Isaiah 60:1-3)*

“The first strophe of this salvation poem summarizes the rest of the poem. Take note of the repetition of the word **come** throughout the passage. The central word is ‘glory’ (*kabhod*). In verse 1, “Arise, shine” is an invitation to Israel to bask in God’s glory. Israel had known darkness. Now God’s glory ‘shines’ and Israel is invited to respond to this manifestation by rising from its despair. The light itself is a gift of God, a chance for Jerusalem to glow for all to see. The light is also God **come** and Israel’s only source of hope.

Verse 2 expresses the contrast between ‘light and ‘darkness,’ the difference between Jerusalem filled with God’s glory, and the rest of the world.

Verse 3 tells how all nations will **come** to the light. It may be summarized by Isaiah 40:5: “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people see it together...” (NRSV).

We all sometimes need to be reminded that we are God’s children who need to come to the ‘light’ as well. Just as Jerusalem was to be a light on a hill for all nations to see God’s glory, we need to come toward this ‘light’ so that we too may be transformed by life in God’s presence. This life in the presence of God should be one of wonder, curiosity, and joy, like that of a young child. By acknowledging and being transformed by the ‘light,’ we too can participate in God’s kingdom.”

- Marcia T. Thompson (from a Sermon Brief on Isaiah 60:1-6)



PRAYER

Holy God,
Encounter us on life’s journey. Lead us to light that
walking we may follow thee,
waiting we may trust Thee,
worshipping we may adore Thee.
Then, let our praise be pregnant with ecstasy at the very
thought of Thee. Amen. +

HYMN 257 "O come, O come, Immanuel"

from 'Antiphons in Latin Breviary' 12th Century ♦ translated by John Mason Neale, 1818-66

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHd2zQQsHUw>

This hymn, originally in Latin, takes us back over 1,200 years to monastic life in the 8th- or 9th-century. Seven days before Christmas Eve monasteries would sing the "O antiphons" in anticipation of Christmas Eve when the eighth antiphon, "O Virgo virginum" ("O Virgin of virgins") would be sung before and after Mary's canticle, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46b-55).

The Latin metrical form of the hymn was composed as early as the 12th century. John Mason Neale (1818-1866), the famous architect of the Oxford movement, discovered the Latin hymn in the appendix of an early 18th-century manuscript, "Psalterium Cationum Catholicorum," with a refrain. Neale, a translator of early Greek and Latin hymns, included it in his influential collection, Mediaeval Hymns and Sequences (1851).

British hymnologist J.R. Watson provides a context for the antiphons: "The antiphons, sometimes called the 'O antiphons' or 'The Great O's', were designated to concentrate the mind on the coming Christmas, enriching the meaning of the Incarnation with a complex series of references from the Old and New Testaments."

Each antiphon begins as follows:

- Sapientia (Wisdom)
- Adonai (Hebrew word for God)
- Radix Jesse (stem or root of Jesse)
- Clavis David (key of David)
- Oriens (dayspring)
- Rex genitium (King of the Gentiles)
- Emmanuel

Put together, the first letter of the second word of each antiphon spells SARCORE. If read backwards, the letters form a two-word acrostic, "Ero cras," meaning "I will be present tomorrow."

All of the Latin attributions to the coming Messiah are from the Old Testament except "Emmanuel," which is found both in Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23. Matthew quotes Isaiah virtually verbatim – "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel" – with the exception that Matthew adds the phrase: "which being interpreted is, God with us."

The "O Emmanuel" antiphon was traditionally sung on the night before Christmas Eve, revealing the meaning of the liturgical riddle through the completion of the acrostic.

John Mason Neale translated the opening line as "Draw nigh, draw nigh, Emmanuel" for his volume of translations, *Mediaeval Hymns and Sequences*. The famous *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861) used Neale's revised translation, which continues to be employed in many hymnals. The block chords of the original musical were eventually replaced with more freely flowing plainsong settings.

There are numerous textual variations in many hymnals, including even the order of the stanzas. With this hymn, the essence of the original Latin text remains. By singing "O come, O come, Emmanuel" with the antiphons interspersed, Christians today may participate in a sacred Advent ritual at least 11 centuries old.

- C. Michael Hawn

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-o-come-o-come-emmanuel>

(Based on Isaiah 52:7-10)

Few of us claim to have "pretty feet," so we hide them inside expensive leather, and decorate them with colored hose. But beautiful feet need no covering; beautiful feet need to be known. We call beautiful the feet of the messenger who announces peace, from the rooftops overlooking troubled streets. We call beautiful the feet of the one who brings good news, to the sick and the forgotten. We call beautiful the feet of the one who announces salvation, to people in hopeless situations. We call beautiful the feet of the one who says, "Your God Reigns"; no matter who thinks that they are in charge!

We see your beautiful feet,
and we sing 'til earth and heaven ring.'
We sense your return,
and we shout so the whole world will know.
We call beautiful the feet of the messenger
who brings us good news!



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

(Matthew 2:1-2)

The hymn ***Beautiful Star of Bethlehem**** speaks about this special star:

*Oh Beautiful Star of Bethlehem shining afar through shadows dim,
Giving the light for those who long have gone;
Guiding the wise men on their way unto the place where Jesus lay,
Oh Beautiful Star of Bethlehem shine on.*

The wise men were convinced that the "king of the Jews" was born and they referred to the star as confirmation, "We saw his star when it rose." Believing they were divinely led, they went to the palace... after all, that's where you would find a king! Herod consulted with his *wise men*, who remembered that the prophet Micah had revealed that a "ruler over Israel" would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Then the star reappeared to guide the wise men to the place so they could worship the child, and present gifts.

We still do the same today -- we worship the Christ, and we present our gifts as tokens of our love. The hymn (which is a prayer set to music) also reminds us that we are still being led today by God's light:

*Oh Beautiful Star the hope of light, guiding the pilgrims through the night
Over the mountains till the break of dawn;
Into the light of perfect day it will give out a lovely ray,
Oh Beautiful Star of Bethlehem shine on.*

Let's pray for the beautiful star of Bethlehem to "shine on" in us and through us.

* by Adger M. Pace & R. Fisher Boyce

PRAYER

O beautiful star of Bethlehem,
shine upon us until the glory dawn,
And into the light of perfect day
it will give out a lovely ray;
Beautiful star of Bethlehem
shine on. *

Amen.



Listen to the hymn

'Beautiful Star of Bethlehem'
by Ben Speer, Amy Lambert,
and the Gaither Choir

recorded live

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=hyPKvtZUm7U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyPKvtZUm7U)

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-10)

These verses of scripture do not use the word **light**, but there must have been a super bright glow when "the glory of the Lord shone around" the shepherds! So bold and powerful were the celestial pyrotechnics that the shepherds "were terrified." But no need to fear, they were assured by the angel, this display signals a wonderful event: "a Saviour has been born to you."

No coincidence, or surprise, that the arrival of the "Light of the world" is a spectacular display of God's glory -- light blazing through the sky, and a chorus of angels singing praises! What may surprise us, though, is the handful of witnesses to this majestic event... just a few sleepy shepherds and their sleeping sheep. We may wonder why God did not share this with the whole world?

Jesus is shared with the whole world -- "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes" (John 3:16) -- but the announcement of his arrival was reserved for a few. When the devil tempted Jesus to impress everyone by doing something spectacular, like throw himself down from the highest point of the Temple (Luke 4:9-11), Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' (verse 12). God didn't set out to impress... He sent Jesus to show us how to live. The blaze of glory announced Jesus' birth, but it is the steady keeping of the flame through following the Master that truly enlightens the world.



PRAYER

Lord God, you who are the source of all truth, wisdom, justice, and love, lead me through each day of service to you. Help me constantly to rest my life upon the eternal foundations of your love and presence. Save me from haste and confusion, from wrongful desire, and the net of evil. Through the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, enlighten, instruct, and guide me all the day long In the name of Jesus. Amen. *

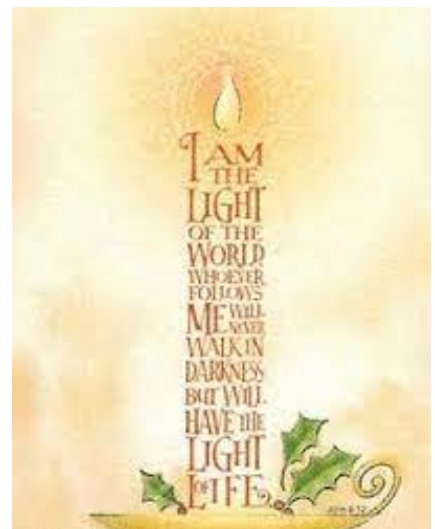
*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
(John 8:12)*

All through the Bible we have been told of the significance of "light" in the spiritual sense... **light** shining in the darkness is a metaphor that speaks of God's presence and power. In the Gospel that bears his name, John introduces Jesus as the "light of all mankind" (John 1:4-5). It is also in the Gospel of John that Jesus introduces himself as "the light of the world" (John 8:12). And in the Epistles of John this call to "walk in the light" is emphasized (1 John 1:5-7). To 'walk in the light' is the evidence that we are followers of Jesus, for: "Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble" (1 John 2:10).

Jesus declares himself the source of light,
the light that we need to "see" how to live in a
way that pleases God. We need, therefore, to
follow him so closely that we are not swallowed
up in the darkness, but we "will have the light of life."

Our prayer should be that of the hymn-writer, on a
Sunday at worship, and everyday at work:

Light of light enlighten me,
Now anew the day is dawning;
Sun of grace, the shadows flee,
Brighten Thou my Sabbath morning:
With all Thy joyous sunshine blest,
Happy is my day of rest!



(Verse 1 of Hymn 663, by Benjamin Schmolck
translated by Catherine Winkworth)

This beautiful song by Lauren Daigle celebrates Jesus as the Light of the world
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4nvVw8z6K8>

PRAYER

Now the light that illuminates every soul, shine and make plain your way, until the light of your life is joined with the Light beyond all light, and we all see even as we are seen, and we know even as we are known, and we are made perfect, even as the Son of God is perfect, and heaven and earth are one. Amen. +

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

Here in these verses Jesus turns around what he said in John (see yesterday's reading). Then he declared himself to be "the light of the world" but now he tells the disciples that they are "the light of the world."

The paraphrase in ***The Message*** makes very plain what Jesus means:

Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

We are the "light-bearers", not hiding under a bucket, but shining bright. So we sometimes sing,

Jesus bids us shine -- you in your small corner and I in mine.

Or we ask God to:

give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning.

Or we declare,

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

Or, in the words of the old chorus, we pray:

Keep me shining, Lord, keep me shining, Lord, in all I say and do;
That the world may see Christ lives in me, and learn to love Him too.

PRAYER

Your glory, most sacred God, burns brighter than the sun and all the stars in your heavens. We cannot sing a song of praise that is too loud or too beautiful.
And this shining light never was more magnificent than when it shone through Jesus. In your mercy, Lord, let the scales of this world fall from our eyes so that we might all join in the chorus of thanksgiving for the light. Amen.

- adapted from Thomas Gildermeister



The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

(2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

The Transfiguration of Jesus is an event where Jesus is transfigured and becomes radiant in glory upon a mountain. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36) describe it, and the Second Epistle of Peter also refers to it (2 Peter 1:16–18). In these accounts, Jesus and three of his apostles, Peter, James, and John, go to a mountain (later referred to as the Mount of Transfiguration) to pray. On the mountaintop, Jesus begins to shine with bright rays of light. Then the Old Testament figures Moses and Elijah appear next to him and he speaks with them. Both figures had eschatological roles: they symbolize the Law and the prophets, respectively. Jesus is then called "Son" by the voice of God the Father, as in his baptism.

The transfiguration is one of the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels. This miracle is unique among others that appear in the canonical gospels, in that the miracle happens to Jesus himself. In Christian teachings, the transfiguration is a pivotal moment, and the setting on the mountain is presented as the point where human nature meets God: the meeting place of the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus himself as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth.

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfiguration_of_Jesus

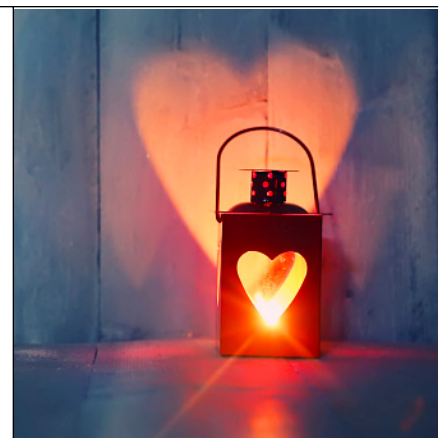
While the Transfiguration speaks literally of the "light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Jesus" we also understand this in the spiritual sense. We have been given a revelation of God's glory in Christ -- he is the connecting point between God and us... the bridge between heaven and earth. As we let his light shine in our hearts, more of God's glory is seen.

PRAYER

Your glory, most sacred God, burns brighter than the sun and all the stars in your heavens. We cannot sing a song of praise that is too loud or too beautiful.

And this shining light never was more magnificent that when it shone through Jesus. In your mercy, Lord, let the scales of this world fall from our eyes so that we might all join in the chorus of thanksgiving for the light. Amen.

- adapted from Thomas Gildermeister



This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another; and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
(1 John 1:5-7)

We know light, or so we think. We know God, or so we think. The power of light and of God is so mighty that no one can miss it. But we can miss the depth of the experience of God. We can miss seeing the intensity, the variations, the majesty of the light. We can know that the room is dark or lit, that the sun is shining or not... we can know the basics about light.

To notice the beautiful hues of light; the wonders of the variations of the angles; the majesty of light's reflection on the waters' edge, on rock formations, on the face of those we love, is to know light intimately. To see how God works in the life story of Jesus Christ, the life story of the early church, in the life story of people around you, and, finally, your own life story, is to know God intimately. To know the God of Light intimately in all manifestations of life is the goal of the believer.

- Linda McKinnish Bridges (from a Sermon Brief on 2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

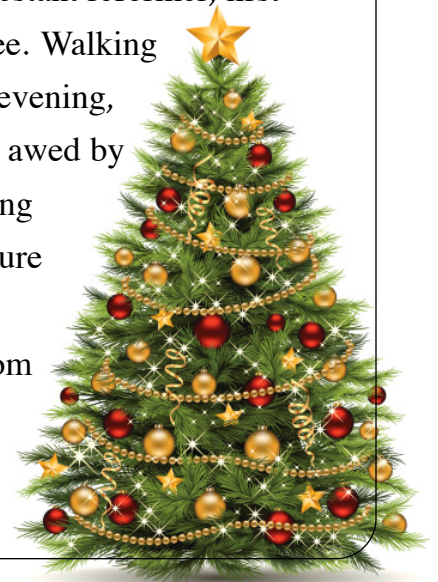
Everything about Christmas has to do with light -- God made light, Jesus is light, we all need light... so it's not surprising that 'light' and lights are incorporated into the celebration of Christmas in many ways. Stars, Candles, lighted Christmas Trees, and more!

AN IRISH BLESSING

God almighty enfold you,
before and after,
in your known way,
and out of your known way,
down to the end of your way,
where Christ waits with
outstretched arms. . .
and angels sing! Amen. +

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles if wood was scarce. It is a widely held belief that Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree. Walking toward his home one winter evening, composing a sermon, he was awed by the brilliance of stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired its branches with lighted candles.

- www.history.com



HYMN 118 “O come, all ye faithful”

Anonymous, 17th or 18th Century ♦ translated by Frederick Oakeley, 1802-80

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxnA6HQRGWk>

This favorite Christmas hymn appears to be the result of a collaboration of several people. What we sing is a 19th-century version of a hymn written in the 18th century. The Latin text comes from the Roman Catholic tradition, found in an 18th-century manuscript in the College at Douai. The college was located in northern France beginning around 1561 and continuing until it was suppressed in 1793. The college was exiled to England at the time of the French Revolution (1789-99).

One possibility is that John Francis Wade (c.1711-1786) was an English musician at the college. Methodist hymnologist Fred Gealy notes: “Seven manuscripts containing the Latin hymn are known; they are dated 1743-61. All appear to have been written, signed, and dated by John Francis Wade, an Englishman who made his living by copying and selling plainchant and other music.”

Research by Dom John Stéphan, author of ‘The Adeste Fidelis: A Study of Its Origin and Development’ (1947), has determined that the first and original manuscript was dated in 1743, indicating that Wade composed both the Latin words and the music between 1740 and 1743.

The English language translation of the stanzas we sing is the work of Frederick Oakeley (1802-1880), a translator of Latin hymns during the Oxford movement who worked closely with Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890), a leader in the movement. Oakeley became a Roman Catholic and was known for his ministry to the poor at Westminster Abbey. Oakeley’s stanzas, penned in 1841, first appeared in F.H. Murray’s Hymnal for Use in the English Church (1852).

Abbé Etienne Jean François Borderies (1764-1832), who was inspired upon hearing the hymn, translated three additional stanzas to fill out the Christmas story. Other versions and many alterations exist as well.

The invitation to “come, all ye faithful... to Bethlehem” places the singer both among the shepherds who rushed to see the Christ child, and in the long procession of the “faithful” that have journeyed to Bethlehem in their hearts for over 2,000 years.

Of particular note is the second stanza that draws heavily upon the Nicene Creed:

True God, of true God,
Light of Light Eternal,
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin’s womb;
Son of the Father,
Begotten, not created.

This paraphrases the text of the Creed very closely:

“We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of very God,
Begotten, not made...”

Thus, singing stanza two establishes a link to the church that reaches back to 325 A.D., at the Council of Nicea, where the Creed originates.

In the third stanza, the “faithful” join their voices with the angels singing “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14). The refrain then becomes a cosmic chorus uniting heaven and earth.

Stanza four places us at the manger scene to welcome the Christ child, and declares Jesus the Word made flesh.

The tune ‘Adeste Fidelis’ by Wade has served this text well – though about as many variations have appeared for the tune over the years, as for the text. The refrain has a fugal feel with the staggered entry of voices until all four parts join in the imperative: “O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”

- John F. Wade

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-o-come-all-ye-faithful-1>

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 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. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 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. (John 1:1-14)



We set up nativity scenes, not to try to recapture what happened that first Christmas, but to remind ourselves that Christ has come! That the world will never be the same, because God Himself arrived on the planet in the form of His Son, Jesus. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

But it's also a reminder that Jesus came into the world the same way all of us do... a baby born into a family; and He arrived in the most humble of circumstances. The wise men were surprised, because, naturally, they thought a king would be in a palace, which is why they went there. The shepherds were not surprised, because the angels told them, "You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). Both were guided by the light of the star... and we, too, should be guided by the 'light' God gives us in every situation. Be grateful that Jesus came! And, remember... He's coming again!

Resources

Unless otherwise identified, all Scripture passages are quoted from the

New International Version (NIV)

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®

Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.®](#)

* A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants © 1983

edited by Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck

published by The Upper Room

♦ Lines to Live By © 1972

edited by Clinton T. Howell

published by Thomas Nelson Publishers

+ Breaking Silence Before The Lord © 1986 AND Prayers for Worship © 1979

by E. Lee Phillips

published by Baker Book House

❖ Prayers of Intercession - Book 1 © 1997

by Susan Sayers

published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

● A Treasury of Hymn Stories © 1945 Reprinted 1992

by Amos R. Wells

published by Baker Book House

✻ More Stories for the Heart © 1997

compiled by Alice Gray

published by Multnomah Publishers, Inc.