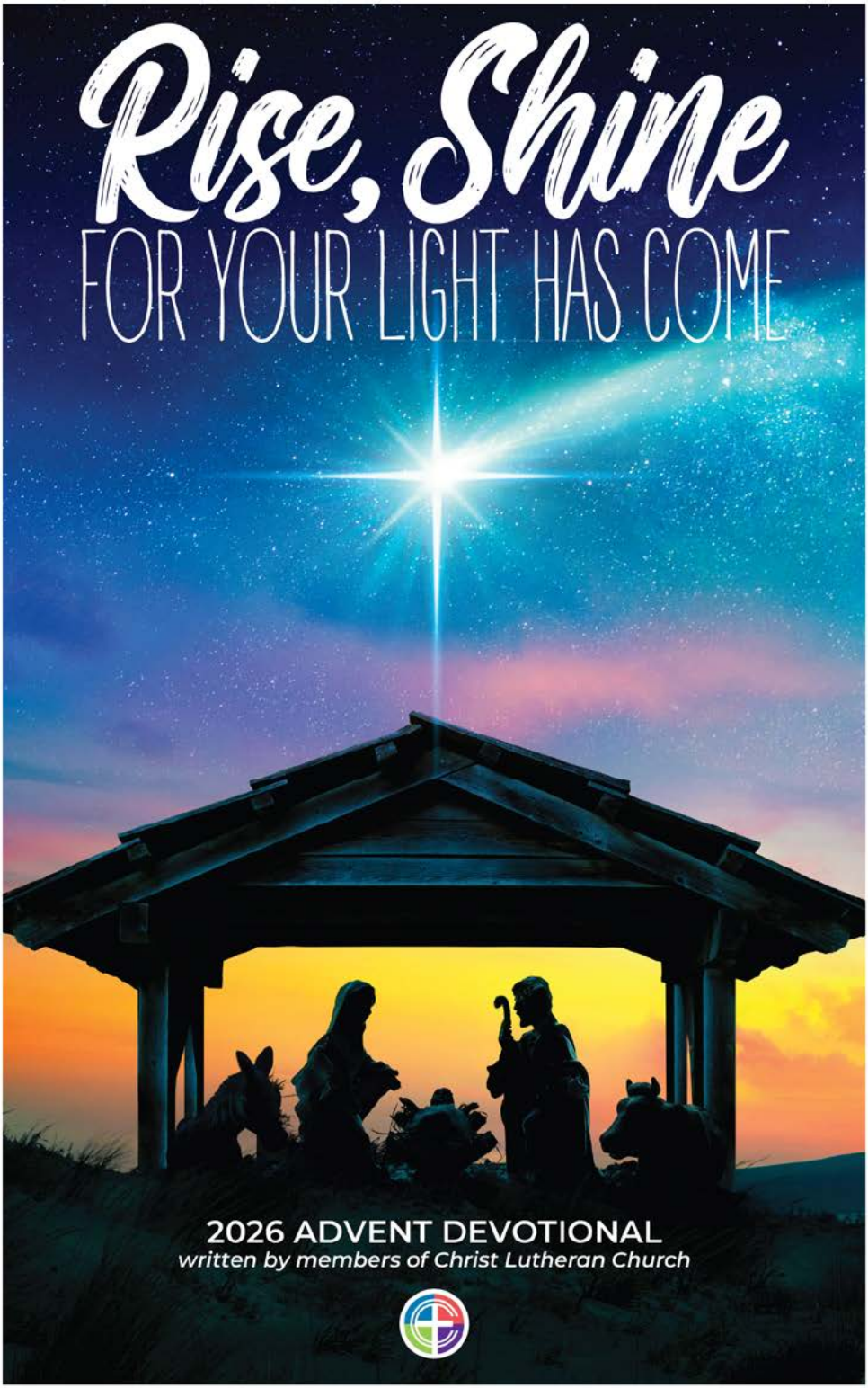

Rise, Shine
FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME
2026 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
written by members of Christ Lutheran Church



Welcome!

DEAR READER,

Welcome to "Rise, Shine, For Your Light Has Come," an Advent Devotional written by the members of Christ Lutheran Church.

When the Family Ministry Team began thinking and planning about this season, we were excited by the idea of a devotional that our congregation members would have — something in their hands to help them wait, wonder and welcome Jesus together. We hoped for something that could fit into a busy December, something you could read at the breakfast table, in the car or at bedtime.

That is exactly what you are holding. Every page was written by someone in our congregation: parents and grandparents, teenagers and children, longtime members and newer friends, individuals and whole families. We invited you to share where you have seen the light of Christ and how you hope to shine it. We were anticipating what would come back, and what came back was a gift. This devotional is filled with stories, reflections and perspectives that remind us that God shows up in kitchens, classrooms, hospital rooms, ball fields and ordinary Tuesdays.

To every writer: thank you. Your courage, your faith, and your time have made this booklet what it is. To every reader: thank you for opening these pages. You will meet neighbors you know and learn something new about them, and you may be surprised how often a sentence from someone else's day puts words to your own.

A few tips: we invite you to read one devotional each day, to pause for reflection and prayer, to listen to the music suggestion found in the link, and to talk about it together. Thank you to our Minister of Music and Worship, Mark Johanson and Minister of Music, Phil Biedenbender for taking the time to select a music selection to accompany each day. Light a candle, draw or journal if you like. If you miss a day, just pick up where you are.

My prayer is that these 27 days will draw you closer to one another and to Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

With Joy,
Pastor Adrienne

Rise, Shine
FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME

Introduction to the Theme

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." ISAIAH 60:1

The prophet Isaiah spoke these words to people who were tired. They had returned home after years in exile, and the city they came back to was in ruins. It felt dark in more ways than one. Into that discouragement, God spoke a surprising word: Get up. The light has already come. Notice that the light was not something the people had to produce. It was God's glory, rising over them. Their part was to rise and reflect it, a bit like the moon, which has no light of its own yet shines in the night sky.

That is the heart of Advent. In December the nights are long, and sometimes our lives feel that way too. Advent doesn't pretend the darkness isn't real. It says that Christ, the true Light of the world, is coming, and that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5).

Our devotions follow that journey over four weeks:
Week One: *Watching for the Light. Waking up, waiting, hoping and longing.*

Week Two: *The Light Is Coming. A voice in the wilderness, repentance, promise, peace and a star.*

Week Three: *Joy Sunday and Beyond. Rejoicing with Mary, humility, courage, children and ordinary people.*

Week Four: *The Light Arrives. Emmanuel, God with us, the longest night and finally, Christmas.*

Each writer answered two simple questions: **Where have you seen the light of Christ?** and **Where are you called to shine it?** There is room in these pages for bright days and dark ones, for certainty and for doubt.

As you read, ask yourself the same questions. You may find you have seen more light than you realized, and that you are already carrying some.



Sunday, November 29

ISAIAH 60:1 (NIV)
Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

ROMANS 13:11–12 (NIV)
And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Are You Afraid of the Dark?

Have you ever felt afraid of the dark? When it's dark at night, it's normal to feel afraid. But when you turn on the night light in your bedroom, the darkness is gone, even though the night light may not be very bright.

In the Bible, the Israelites were in a tough situation: they were living in exile, which means they were being forced to live away from their homeland. They thought God had left them in the dark! But in the book of Isaiah, God assures the Israelites that he would bring them light and peace. God isn't talking about a night light, though—he's talking about Jesus!

We know that God never leaves us in the dark, but sometimes we choose darkness instead of light. If you say hurtful things to your parents, do mean things to a sibling on purpose, or break the rules at school, you separate yourself from God and can make it feel like you're living in darkness. Instead, do what Paul tells us to do in the book of Romans: "put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:12). In other words, be Jesus' light everywhere you go, so other people see the light, too. It makes me think of the song, "This Little Light of Mine." Like a night light, we can make the darkness vanish even with just a little bit of God's light.

This Advent season, remember two things: Jesus has come to be the light of the world, and you get to reflect that light to others who need to know about Jesus.

–MR. MARK

MUSIC SELECTION:
"This Little Light of Mine" by Bruce Springsteen
Listen here: t.ly/ngjdp

Monday, November 30

LAMENTATIONS 3:25–26 (NIV)
The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

PSALM 27:14 (NIV)
Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

The Waiting is the Hardest Part

Ryan and I were thrilled when the day came to welcome our first baby. We had the nursery ready, the car seat installed and the hospital bag packed. We eagerly drove to the hospital, only to arrive and have my contractions completely stop. Unable to be admitted, and living an hour from the hospital, we decided to get a nearby hotel. We were sure that we wouldn't have to wait long.

We did everything we could to coax our baby out. Nothing worked. We patiently (and not so patiently) waited. Wednesday turned into Thursday. Thursday turned into Friday. We finally had enough progress to be admitted into the hospital. After what felt like an eternity, our baby finally made his arrival on Saturday, four days later. We named him Gabriel, meaning God is my strength.

Faithfully waiting can be hard. Scripture is full of long seasons of waiting. Abraham waited many years for the birth of his promised son. After his anointing, David waited over a decade before he became king. The Israelites waited 40 years in the desert before entering the Promised Land. Psalm 27:14 encourages us, "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage." Lamentations 3:25–26 says, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

Advent is a time of faithful waiting. We wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus while eagerly anticipating His return. As we sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," we are reminded that our hope is in waiting for God's promises. We wait in hope, as we journey through Advent and our own seasons of waiting. In doing so, we can take heart knowing that Jesus is our light and is always faithful in the waiting.

MUSIC SELECTION:
"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"
For KING + COUNTRY
Listen here: t.ly/1ido3

Let us pray. *Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, we thank you for being with us in this season of waiting. During this time of Advent, we ask you to quiet our souls, give us the courage to be still, and trust in your timing. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

–ASHLEY RITZMANN

Tuesday, December 1

ISAIAH 9:2 (NIV)
The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

JOHN 1:5 (NIV)
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Arise, Shine: Out of the Darkness

Darkness is not merely a lack of dawn; it is the isolation, shame and despair that heavy places carry. Four years ago, God called me into one of those dark places through Kairos Prison Ministry. Walking into a prison, you feel the weight of confinement, heavy with regret. Yet, following the call to "Listen, Listen, Love, Love" our team of volunteers experienced the Holy Spirit using us to share God's grace with 30 incarcerated men over a 4-day weekend. I have seen the light of Jesus shining in the tears of hardened men realizing they are forgiven and in transforming my new brothers-in-Christ to become beacons of love and hope to their fellow prisoners.

This is the very heartbeat of Advent. The light of Christ is coming, it has always been coming, and we are not merely passive recipients of that love. We are made to reflect it, carry it and boldly shine it into the shadows around us. Jesus entering our broken world means that no place — no matter how guarded, locked or forgotten — is beyond the reach of His redeeming grace.

So, where have you seen the light of Christ, and where are you called to shine it today? Lord Jesus, let Your unshakeable light break through our darkest corners, and make us faithful Christ-bearers of Your love to a world that desperately needs to see Your dawn. Amen.

–DAVID DEEDS



MUSIC SELECTION:
"The People That Walketh"
Trinity Wallstreet Baroque
Listen here: t.ly/ocj5i

Wednesday, December 2

ROMANS 15:13 (NIV)
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

PSALM 130:5–6 (NIV)
I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Hope: Waiting in God's Light

Have you ever found yourself waiting for something without knowing how things will turn out? Maybe it is an answer to a prayer, a change in your circumstances, or simply reassurance that everything will be okay. Waiting can be difficult, especially when life feels uncertain and the future seems unclear. Sometimes, all we have to hold onto is hope.

In Romans 15:13, Paul reminds us that God is the source of hope and that through faith, He fills us with joy and peace. To me, this means that hope is not about knowing exactly what tomorrow will bring. It is about trusting that God is already there, even when we cannot see what He is doing. I have learned that life does not always go according to our plans. There are moments when we feel discouraged, overwhelmed, or unsure of our next steps. However, those moments do not mean God has forgotten us.

Psalm 130:5–6 speaks about waiting for the Lord with anticipation, just as a watchman waits for the morning. I love this comparison because no matter how long or dark the night may feel, morning eventually comes. This reminds me of Jesus, who entered the world as the light of the world. Through His birth, life, death, and resurrection, Jesus reminds us that darkness never has the final word. His light brings comfort, forgiveness, and a hope that cannot be taken away.

As you go throughout your day, remember that hope is not found in having everything figured out. It is found in knowing who holds your future.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us remain hopeful when life feels uncertain. Fill our hearts with Your peace and remind us that Your light will always shine, even in our darkest moments. Amen.

–JA'NIYAH HALL



MUSIC SELECTION:
"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" Luther Norskkor/For KING + COUNTRY
Listen here: t.ly/2vtcy

Thursday, December 3

ISAIAH 64:1 (NIV)
Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

REVELATION 22:20 (NIV)
He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

What do you want so badly that it hurts? Maybe you long for a way out of a bad situation, for a loved one to be healed, or for a relationship to begin. When we hear about or experience the darkest parts of the world - injustice, oppression, violence, starvation - does that hurt our hearts just as much? It's easy to feel overwhelmed by terrible news from a world bearing the full consequences of sin, but the solution is not to turn away from suffering. We can respond with Isaiah and the author of Revelation by longing and praying for God to come into our world and bring the light of justice and righteousness. This is a bold prayer. What they describe is not a gentle dawning but a blinding flash that vanquishes darkness once and for all. May we be so moved by longing for God's perfect reign that we are willing to pray — and act — boldly, that God's kingdom would come in our lives and bring light where it is needed most.

–ELIZABETH MARQUARDT

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" Cambridge Singers
Listen here: t.ly/ogef4

Friday, December 4

ISAIAH 40:3-4 (NIV)
Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

MARK 1:3 (NIV)
"a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Preparation

Like a freshly paved and widened highway that takes forever to complete, strengthening our connection to God takes work. But when we put in that work, it becomes that much easier for us to feel Him.

As with most things these days, when I read this scripture, I think about raising my kids. Am I doing enough to help them build a foundation for their own path to God? Sure, we regularly attend church and Sunday school, jam out to K-LOVE in the car, squeeze in early morning Bible studies with the baseball team when we get that 9 AM start, read our "One-Minute Devotions for Boys" each night, and say our prayers.

But is it enough? Is it enough in this big city and fast-paced world we live in, constantly juggling busy schedules? Am I feeding their faith and preparing them to know God well enough for when life gets hard? Because if there is one thing you can count on, it is that life will get hard.

It is a clear and strong connection to God, and knowing the sure and certain hope He provides that can help us get to the other side of any situation. Whether it is with raising your kids or not, we all experience so many things pulling us away from the Lord. What is something you can do today to build a stronger path to God?

–ERIN MOHN

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Prepare the Royal Highway" St. Olaf
Listen here: t.ly/eh20b

Saturday, December 5

LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23 (NIV)
Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

PSALM 36:5 (NIV)
Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

Faithfulness

Some of the ways that God has been faithful in my life is by placing me in a home with Christian parents; knowing love at home and being taught in Sunday School and church about the love of Jesus.

His faithfulness allowed me to grow in my faith.

The blessing of good health until, 7 years ago when I received the news of stage four GI cancer.

What a shock!
Today I don't have cancer!
It was an adventure, but I was not alone.

God's faithfulness guided many to be a blessing to me during this difficult time.

Today I have a New Life.

I love being active in several outreach opportunities here at CLC such as making quilts and prayer squares to share.

100 Days of Prayer brought prayer closer to my daily life where I was introduced to a new (to me) devotional, New Morning Mercies by Tripp, by a new friend.

Celebrating Jesus and allowing Him to lead me in "Sharing the Joy"

Jesus. Others. Yourself.

Join me this Advent Season.

–TRISH ELROD

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Great Is Thy Faithfulness" Carrie Underwood ft. CeCe Winans
Listen here: t.ly/atr69



Sunday, December 6

LUKE 3:4
As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

ISAIAH 40:9
You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

The Voice in the Wilderness

Even in the wilderness, a voice cries out. Even when the tall trees surrounding us feel like our problems towering overhead, there is one voice powerful enough to break through the canopy. It is God calling us to make room for His presence and share His message with the world.

I often turn to music to worship and feel God's presence, but sometimes I can get a little lost in the wilderness and forget to tune in.

Recently, while my family was going through a difficult time, I was driving after hearing some difficult news, worried and anxious about what would happen next. My music automatically came on, playing a secular alternative band that I barely noticed. I was too distracted to change it. I stopped at a store to pick up food for my family and attempted to pray while waiting, but I couldn't quite focus. Once I got back in my car, my music started playing again, but this time it was "All Hail King Jesus" by Bethel Music. There was His voice in the wilderness.

His voice feels like the clouds finally breaking apart after a storm or a canopy of trees allowing a distinct beam of light to break through. He shines to bring hope, direction, and new life. Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ, we are called to point others to the Light. We may be the voice, but Jesus is the message.

Reflection Questions:
- How have you heard His voice in the midst of darkness?
- How can you share His light with others today?

–ANNABELLE PRICE

MUSIC SELECTION:
"O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion"
Boston Baroque
Listen here: t.ly/sczit

Monday, December 7

LUKE 3:8 (NIV)
Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 (NIV)
Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Repentance

Reading these verses reminds me of times when one turns to Christ to lead them and guide them through life's journeys. For many it seems the distractions and demands of everyday life can divert our attention from our faith and commitment to worship as a Christian should. God often brings us back to focus when life's demands become overwhelming and we realize we need the guidance and comfort that can only comes from answered prayer and divine help from our faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Many times in my life when faced with challenges I have found comfort, guidance and peace through prayer and a commitment to worship as God commanded us to do. Prayer and asking for God's guidance in everything we do assures us that we are never alone in life's journey.

Dear God, we ask you to guide us in all that we do and that we ask you to guide us in our faith and lead us to renewed commitment to your love for us. Amen.

–STEPHEN LADD



MUSIC SELECTION:
"Comfort, Comfort Now My People" Plymouth Congregation
Listen here: t.ly/e8gde

Tuesday, December 8

ISAIAH 7:14 (NIV)
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

MATTHEW 1:22–23 (NIV)
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Fulfilling Promises

When I play guitar in Xperience I make promises. I promise that I will devote my time to, honor, and focus on God and the people I'm with. These are the promises that we make so that we can accomplish our tasks in glorifying God. If these promises are broken or just not made then things can start to derail and become cluttered and disorganized.

Our spiritual lives are the same. God made promises with us through prophets to give us hope that his son Jesus will be coming soon. In Isaiah 7:14 it says, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel." In Matthew 1:22–21

it says, “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us.’” These verses show us that God was making promises with us that his son would come to us.

In the song King of Kings the first verse says “ ...to fulfill the law and prophets to a virgin came the Word...” This song gives a not so subtle nod to Isaiah and Matthew. The writers of King of Kings wrote this line so that all who may hear their song will know that God was fulfilling the promises He gave to the prophets.

MUSIC SELECTION:
“Light of the World” Lauren Daigle
Listen here: t.ly/vosj4

Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us remember that you have fulfilled your promises before and that you will follow through again. Help us as we go through our lives to see your promises in action and to become your promise to others. In your name we pray, Amen.

–GABE RITZMANN, 10TH GRADER

Wednesday, December 9

JOEL 2:28 (NIV)
“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”

ACTS 2:17 (NIV)
In the last days, God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”

Prophets and Dreamers



MUSIC SELECTION:
“King of Kings” Hillsong
Listen here: t.ly/b2shz

–GEORGE HUTCHINSON

Thursday, December 10

ISAIAH 9:6 (NIV)
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.

LUKE 2:14 (NIV)
"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Peace

"'Peace! Be Still!', Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm."

In my life, I was trying to live out my life for God, not His life for me. I say this with trust. That might sound the same but it is really different, truly. I was living in what I thought were the plans He had for me, and I still have that part of me, but the thing is, only God knows the plans he has for us and it is by faith in him that if we walk where he guides, he will show us the way. "Jesus." That one word is a statement of trust. He knows your thoughts and what you're going through. Your struggles right now. "Jesus." He is there, trust, say it, whisper, shout. We can get so caught up in work, school, stuff, that we forget whose and who we are. Peace, wholeness, completeness. Isaiah 9:6, "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." God is the Prince Of Peace. When you call on Him, when you say his name, you are calling on the Prince of Peace. Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" Peace among those whom he favors. Peace, completeness, wholeness. Sit in his peace, call on his name. It can get rough, but one thing that never changes is that God is the Prince of Peace. That when you call on his name, wherever, whenever, He will guide you, He will bring you peace, make you whole, complete in his hands.

Peace.
The peace.
Peace that passes
understanding.

–JACKSON STURTZ

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Desired of All the Nations" GPA Worship
Listen here: t.ly/5xcah

Friday, December 11

MICAH 5:2 (NIV)
"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

MATTHEW 2:6 (NIV)
"'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

Unexpected Places

Would anyone expect "Messiah" to be born in such a small unimportant place as Bethlehem. The chosen people were expecting a King/soldier to free them from Roman subjugation and terror – not a baby born in a manger in such common circumstances. The "Messiah" shows up in such an unexpected place under unexpected circumstances to build a kingdom not of this world. They did not expect "Messiah" to build a kingdom of believers for a heavenly army.

The light shines for us in many places outside our normal church worship. Every day offers opportunities to shine our light. It's a time of waiting and watching for opportunities to show love, kindness and compassion for others. Our light shines on how we treat others in simple every day events and circumstances. Do we see Jesus in every person we meet – do we feed his sheep with love and kindness!

In our everyday life we look for those opportunities to show love in unexpected ways to unsuspecting people. It can be paying for items for someone else while standing in line at the grocery store. Billie Jo surprised me now and again when she pays for someone's modest grocery purchase. She has surprised so many people with this simple but heart felt act. I, myself have felt the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit when tutoring 7'th grade math. There have been instances where I struggled to explain a math concept that I understood but needed help to explain it to a student. I felt the "light" that gave me the way to get through this impasse.

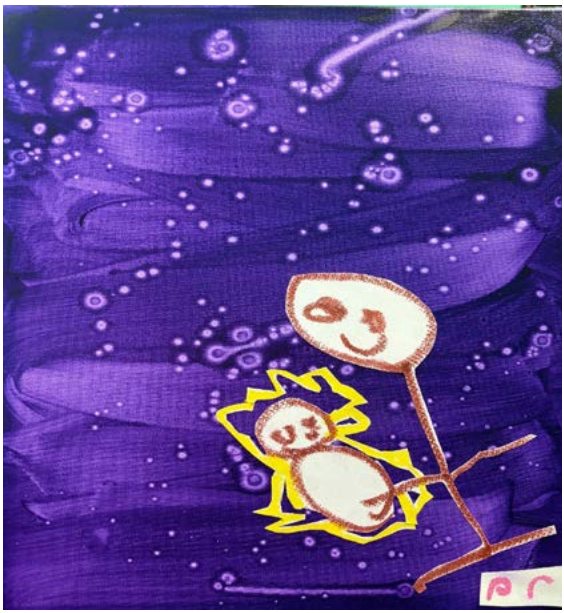
As Christian people we should be looking for ways to be loving, kind and patient to every person in every situation. The light of Jesus should shine on everything we do regardless of the situation or circumstances. We are all capable of showing "unexpected" love and kindness to everyone we meet. In this time of waiting, watching and waking up, we can all shine our light on unexpecting people in unexpected ways and in unexpected places.

MUSIC SELECTION:
"O Little Town of Bethlehem" Dan Forrest
Listen here: t.ly/kketd

–BILLIE JO & ED SCHWEITZER

Saturday, December 12

The Star



–BENJI HUTCHINSON

NUMBERS 24:17 (NIV)
"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth."

MATTHEW 2:1–2 (NIV)
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."

Note from Benji's mom: the "pr" at the corner of his painting is his shorthand for "Praise."

MUSIC SELECTION:
"What a Glorious Night" Sidewalk Prophets
Listen here: t.ly/3w1ko



Sunday, December 13

ISAIAH 61:10 (NIV)
I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4 (NIV)
Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Joy

It has been almost 38 years, but I still remember the feeling on my wedding day of being all dressed up in the gown that I knew was perfect for me. I also recall my anticipation as I waited with my dad until they opened the door to the sanctuary and allowed me to see the man I would spend the rest of my life with.

We should have the same anticipation for the day we will meet Jesus face-to face with joy and rejoicing. In Philippians 4:4, Paul tells us twice to rejoice, and we all know from Pastor Scott that if the Bible says something twice, we need to listen. Why should we have joy? Because Jesus has clothed all believers with "garments of salvation and robes of righteousness". Just as my husband saw me adorned beautifully on our wedding day, God will see Jesus' beauty and light in us on the day we enter heaven because of His sacrifice on the cross. He will not see our good deeds, or lack thereof; He will not see our sins, our impure thoughts or the good intentions we never followed through on. He will only see Jesus' light. That's that best reason I can think of to be joy-filled!

Dear Jesus, thank You so much for Your sacrifice, for the light You brought into this world and for Your promise of salvation.

–JILL GIBSON, MEMBER FOR 34 YEARS

MUSIC SELECTION:
"O Come, All Ye Faithful" Pentatonix
Listen here: t.ly/wp0j1

Monday, December 14

LUKE 1:46–49 (NIV)
And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name."

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 (NIV)
The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

Rejoicing

Rejoicing isn't just about feeling joyful or being outright happy. Sometimes life doesn't unfold the way we imagined, and it's easy to let our circumstances determine our joy. True rejoicing isn't about everything going right; it's about remembering who is always by our side.

Mary responds to God's calling with an open heart, ready to praise. She didn't know exactly what the future held, but she recognized that God was doing something extraordinary. For Mary, and for many of us, His light shines through when we put our trust in Him. The same God we praise is the God who delights in us. His light provides us with such abundance that we can't help but rejoice.

Just as Mary rejoiced in what God was doing, we can rejoice in what He has done through Jesus. This Advent season, let's remember that we don't have to wait for the perfect moment or perfect circumstances to praise Him. We can find joy in knowing He is with us, working in us, and singing over us.

Reflection Question:
• How are you finding reasons to rejoice in your current circumstances?

–ANNABELLE PRICE

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Canticle of the Turning" Sisken Green
Listen here: t.ly/2v1y7

Tuesday, December 15

LUKE 1:52–53 (NIV)
He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

JAMES 4:10 (NIV) *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

Walking Humbly with God

The prophet Micah told us what God expects: act with justice, be kind and walk humbly with God. Mary showed great humility. She was only 14 or 15, a virgin visited by an angel and the Holy Spirit. Now she is pregnant with Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, her feelings are recorded in the Magnificat. She gave herself to God as a humble servant and walked by faith without knowing what the future would bring.

God showed even greater humility. He came from heaven to earth as the child of an unwed mother. He was born in a dirty stable, surrounded by animal waste, flies and vermin. He was wrapped in cloth and laid in a feeding trough. This is how far God humbled himself to live among us.

I was born on a farm in rural Union County, North Carolina. My first home was a three-room sharecropper's house with no heat or running water. There was a barn near the house so I know the dirt, smells, spiders and cobwebs of a stable. It is not a place anyone would choose for a newborn child, especially the Son of God.

Through hard work and God's will, I became the first doctor in my family's 150-year history. God called me into a ministry of healing at age 14 and blessed me to serve people across the Carolinas for 42 years. I have tried to remain humble and faithful, remembering James 4:10: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

–JOHN SENSENBRENNER

MUSIC SELECTION:
"What Child Is This?" Andrea Bocelli, Mary J. Blige
Listen here: t.ly/uuyn4

Wednesday, December 16

MATTHEW 18:3 (NIV)
And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

MARK 10:14–15 (NIV)
When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Children

Opening — May the precious hearts of children teach us to reflect the Light of Jesus into the World.

Personal Reflection — In this Advent Season, our hearts are full of gratitude for the miracle of our sweet granddaughter, Matilda. She was born with Trisomy 21 (Downs Syndrome) and a severe heart defect. She spent 5 months in the Cardiac ICU working to grow her tiny heart. Finally a surgery date was set. As part of the preparation for surgery, Pastor Scott was asked to Baptize Matilda in the Cardiac ICU. The day of surgery was a tough morning of waiting and anticipation after the surgeon shared with the family, "I don't know if I can fix her heart." Tough words to hear, for sure. But, God was present in the waiting and anticipation on that day. The surgeon was a true gift from God, a miracle worker as God guided his hands to repair Matilda's tiny heart. Now in this Advent Season, 23 months later, we marvel at this precious child, a Gift from God. We wait with full hearts anticipating to see what marvelous plans God has in store for Matilda! She will teach us many lessons along the way as she shines the Light of Jesus into the World.

Heavenly Father, May we all have hearts like children and reflect the Light of Jesus into the world. Amen.

–JOHN AND CHERYL PLONK

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Away in a Manger" by Veggie Tales
Listen here: t.ly/h0jsc

Thursday, December 17

ISAIAH 41:10
Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Courage

I am getting older and my body seems to be turning against me. I remember my grandmother saying, "Growing old is not for sissies." I am beginning to fully understand what she meant. It takes courage to face each new physical change. Isaiah's words "Do not fear, for I am with you" have a deeper meaning for me now.

I used to sail through an annual exam, now I leave with a list of test dates. Something so simple as an eye exam has become a daunting discussion of possible issues. On and on it goes in a terrifying jumble of new diagnoses and possible fixes.

"Do not be afraid, for I am your God." Do I have the courage to stop and let the words sink in? What does that verse mean for me now that I am experiencing the beginnings of aging? My 83 year old aunt just put my uncle in hospice.

"It is in God's hands now," she said. My aunt and uncle were healthy eaters, walked every day, and had an active lifestyle in retirement. They were faithful, now faith demands the courage to trust in God and his promises.

"I will strengthen you. I will help you." As the stark reality that my body and the body of those I love is fading, can the promises of God break through my fear? My faith gives me the courage to believe the words, breathe in the light and power of the promises "I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

–D'LINDA HIGHUM

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Whom Shall I Fear? (God of Angel Armies)" Chris Tomlin
Listen here: t.ly/rd9ew

Friday, December 18

LUKE 1:38 (NIV) *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

GENESIS 12:1 (NIV)
The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."

Mary's Yes

"Lead me, Lord, lead me in your righteousness, make your way plain before my face...." After my new mother, Arlene, moved to a retirement home in Oklahoma and after the passage of several years, her health began to decline. Luckily, I was able to visit every several months to walk with her on this journey and arrange for her care. Since I wasn't used to traveling alone, I always prayed that Jesus would lead me and use me. Every visit brought new and wondrous experiences of God's help and use of me. On one of those trips, I had a plane change in St. Louis, MO.

Once on board the second plane, I was talking to my seatmate when the announcement came on to deboard. The date was 9/11 and all further air travel had been cancelled. Some business travelers had cell phones, but I had no way to contact family, friends or hotels. As the airport cleared out, I noticed that about 6 of us were left with nowhere to go. I silently prayed for Jesus' help. Suddenly, a man and woman appeared and offered to take us to their small, home church, feed us and put us up for the night! My new "roommate" from Tulsa was able to call her son who then drove to St. Louis the next day, put us in his little pickup truck, and made the ten-hour drive back to Tulsa! The light of Christ shone steadily forth in the Christian hospitality extended to our little group from the airport and in that little truck.

Mary's and Abraham's calls from the Lord God were to step out into the unknown led by faith, the same call that Peter had from Jesus to step out of the boat to walk on water by faith, the same call each of us has to care for our neighbor, especially the widow and the outcast. How do I see the light of Christ? Every day, I say a prayer and sing a song of thanksgiving and obedience to the God of our Salvation. For example, "Guide me, ever great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but you are mighty. Hold me with your powerful hand...."

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Breath of Heaven" Amy Grant
Listen here: t.ly/xamur

–LINDA MORESI

Saturday, December 19

LUKE 2:8–10 (NIV)
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."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:27–29 (NIV)
But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Ordinary People

When we think about the people God uses, sometimes we imagine people who have everything figured out. People who are strong in their faith, know exactly what to say, and never seem to mess up. But when you look throughout the Bible, that's not really who God chooses. In Luke 2, when Jesus was born, the first people to hear the news weren't kings, rulers, or important religious leaders. It was shepherds. Ordinary people who were out in the fields doing their ordinary everyday jobs. But it doesn't matter; God chose them to be some of the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus.

I think that's something we can all relate to. Sometimes we feel like we're not worthy or good enough to do something for God. Maybe we think we don't know enough about the Bible, aren't strong enough in our faith, or have made too many mistakes. We look at other people and think they're much better Christians than we are. The truth is none of us are perfect Christians, also 1st Corinthians 1:27–28 reminds us that God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things to shame the strong. God doesn't need us to be perfect or have everything figured out. He can work through ordinary people just like us.

I think sometimes we get so caught up in trying to become the perfect Christian that we forget God can use us right where we are. We don't have to wait until we're older, smarter, or stronger in our faith to make a difference. The shepherds didn't have some special qualifications. They simply received the good news and went to see Jesus.

So the question is, are we willing to let God work through us? Because being ordinary doesn't mean God can't do extraordinary things through you. Sometimes all it takes is being willing to say yes.

–DOTUN OSUNDINA



MUSIC SELECTION:
"Go Tell it on the Mountain" St. Olaf
Listen here: t.ly/zb1ku



Sunday, December 20

MATTHEW 1:23 (NIV)
"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

ISAIAH 7:14 (NIV)
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Immanuel

An Old Testament prophecy and the New Testament promise fulfilled with a wait time of 700 years. That is generations of Israelites that waited. I don't mind waiting when I know when the wait time is over. But this long-awaited promise; the promise of "God with us" was worth the wait.

After so long, the children of Israel must have begun to think the promise would certainly come with some fanfare. Surprisingly, He came quietly and humbly. His birth was amazing, to be sure, but they didn't expect His coming to be so human, so mundane, and so imperfect. Ironically, that is how Immanuel needed to come to us so He could enter into our human, mundane, and imperfect lives. He never waits to come when we're cleaned up, grown up, and made up. He is with us wherever we are right now.

Over a decade ago, our family faced a crisis that was life-altering. Most experts agreed there was no hope of overcoming the eventual outcome. It was mid-December. A time to gather our children home from college and supposedly a time to celebrate. However, as we tenderly navigated through the days of Advent, I clung to the promise, "Immanuel, God with us." In the darkest of days, His nearness was our strength. I know for sure that during that time I cried out to God from the depths of my soul as never before and I came to know His presence as Immanuel in a profound way. Ultimately, the battle was overcome, and we will forever be grateful for God's deliverance. Those wretched days are also some of my most treasured memories because He was "with" us.

So in the midst of our December holidays, are you facing some wretchedness of your own? Is your heart anxious or fearful? Is your life a bit messy or unpredictable right now? Maybe you are lonely and missing a version of life that will never be again. The promise comes to you as surely as it did through the words of Scripture. He is Immanuel, God with us. It is a promise we can cling to most assuredly. God the Father, through Jesus, the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is faithful. He is all we need!

–CHRIS O'BOYLE

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Hark the Herald Angels Sing" Wheaton College
Listen here: t.ly/qnysp

Monday, December 21

PSALM 139:11–12 (NIV) *If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*

JOHN 1:5 (NIV) *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

The Longest Night

Earlier this year, I lost my father. I was blessed to spend a few days with him before he passed, and he told me, "Don't be afraid. I will always be with you."

At the time, I remember thinking selfishly, That's easy for you to say. You won't be here for me to call for advice, and you won't be on the sidelines cheering me on at my next race. But as the days turned into months, I began to be more intentional during my early morning runs. I started leaving my headphones behind and simply listening. I found myself noticing the trees, the stars, and the sounds of nature waking up before sunrise. I began to believe that maybe my dad was right. He was still with me, just in a different way.

Psalm 139:11–12 reminds us that even in darkness, God sees us. The night is not dark to Him; even darkness is like light. And John 1:5 tells us, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

What a beautiful reminder, especially during Advent. Christ came into a world that knew pain, uncertainty, and darkness to be our everlasting light.

I still miss my dad and wish I could pick up the phone and hear his voice. But I am learning that even when someone we love is no longer physically beside us, we are never truly alone.

As we move through this Advent season, when life feels heavy and the darkness seems overwhelming, remember that God sees you, God is with you, and His light will never be overcome by darkness. Sometimes we just need to be still, listen, and recognize the light that has been there all along.

–REBECCA STURTZ

MUSIC SELECTION:
"O Holy Night" Josh Groban
Listen here: t.ly/7wx7j

Tuesday, December 22

LUKE 2:6–7 (NIV) *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

MICAH 5:2 (NIV) *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*

Almost

Micah 5:2 is a prophecy about where Jesus would be born. It says that although Bethlehem was a small and seemingly unimportant place, a ruler would come from there who would shepherd God's people. Bethlehem may have seemed like an ordinary place, but God had a much bigger purpose for it.

Luke 2:6–7 shows this prophecy being fulfilled. Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem

and laid Him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. The Savior of the world entered into the world in such a humble way. Jesus did not come with wealth or power. He came as a baby, bringing hope and light to the world.

These verses remind us that God often works in unexpected ways. Jesus, the Light of the World, was born in a stable, showing us that even the smallest places can hold God's greatest blessings.

As we reflect on these verses today, we are especially reminded of God's light as we celebrate Claire's 17th birthday. We are so thankful for the blessing of being her parents and for the joy and love she brings into our lives. Watching her grow has been one of God's greatest gifts to us.

We have also experienced Christ's light during seasons of uncertainty, when things haven't gone as planned or we haven't understood God's timing. Those moments remind us that even when we cannot see the bigger picture, God is always present & working.

We believe we are called to shine His light through the way we love our family, encourage others, serve our church, and show kindness in everyday moments.

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Messiah" Francesca Battistelli
Listen here: t.ly/89lws

Our Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the gift of Claire and the joy of celebrating her birthday. Thank you for the light and love she brings into our lives. Help us trust your plan, feel your presence through every season, and share your love and kindness with those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

–THE CANNON FAMILY

Wednesday, December 23

PSALM 98:1 (NIV) *Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.*

Anticipation

So many times, I have found myself sitting on the edge of my bed, asking... calling out to the Lord, will things change? My prayers are answered? After I finish with my self-absorption, I begin to realize all the many times the Lord has pulled me through, put the right people in the place at the right time, or the unexpected "gift" just in the nick of time.

As Advent begins, I remember the new doll that arrived each Christmas, always just in time. My gifts today are more meaningful: home, family, friends, and health, to name a few. A few short years ago, I was unhoused, and my needs multiplied: food, shelter, and a job. I needed everything, and somehow everything fell into place, never a moment too late. I am amazed at how He has blessed me and continues to bless me! When asked how I made it, I answer, "By the Grace of God, the greatest gift of all."

This season, let us not lose sight of the marvelous ways the Lord keeps us, blesses and guides us. Perhaps not on our timeline, but ALWAYS in time!

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"
Atlanta Master Chorale
Listen here: t.ly/z9a8f

O Lord, enter my heart. Open my eyes to the beauty and wonder You bring each day and help me recognize Your gifts. May all glory be given in Your name. Amen.

–SARA RENTMEESTER

Thursday, December 24

ISAIAH 9:6 (NIV)
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.

LUKE 2:1–7 (NIV)
In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

The Night Everything Changed

A year ago, my twin sister died, filling me with a profound sense of loss, and for months afterwards, I wondered why God allowed her to die when she had dreams of having a hospitality ministry in the mountains once she and her husband retired from teaching overseas. For many years, she longed to minister to others through hospitality but had little opportunity to do so, so this dream of hers seemed like a dream the Lord had given her. I dreamed of spending time with my sister once she returned to North Carolina, but neither of these dreams would come true. Why? This fall, I am reading a book on spiritual formation, and one chapter was about affliction. The author had experienced a great loss, too, and as he dealt with his pain, he came to the conclusion that "God has not chosen to eliminate suffering but to suffer with us." In Luke 2:1–7, Luke describes very succinctly the birth of Jesus — God in human form — the Christ who would experience human sufferings of hunger, pain, fatigue and eventually a torturous death on a cross for our sins. Yes, God has come, and He is with us in our sufferings, bringing us the comfort and peace that we need — often, through the Body of Christ ministering to us. He is our Counselor, our Strength, our Father and our Peace that passes all understanding. He is our light in the darkness of our pain. As the author of the book wrote: "When tragedy strikes, don't force answers that aren't there. Sit in the dark with your grief and bring the silence itself before God." I don't have to know why my sister died. I just need to know that God loves her, and she is with Him, and I will see her again one day. In the meantime, I can be a blessing to her family.

On Christmas day, our Light came in Jesus Christ, who suffered for us, suffers with us when we grieve and brings an inexplicable light into our lives when we least expect it. When we allow Him to fill us with His light and love, then we can shine His light and love upon others who are in need. Think and pray about how you can shine His light and love into the lives of others this coming year.

–LAURA TANG, FOLLOWER OF JESUS

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Silent Night" King's College
Listen here: t.ly/2h00z

Friday, December 25

JOHN 1:1–5, 14 (NIV)
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. 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.

ISAIAH 60:1–3 (NIV)
"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."

The Light Has Come

Christmas Day is finally here! The excitement of gathering around the tree, unwrapping gifts, and enjoying the familiar traditions that make this day special. Our homes are filled with light, laughter, and love. But in the midst of all the excitement, we should remember that the beauty of Christmas isn't just in the anticipation of His coming; it's in knowing that the brightest Light the world has ever known is still shining today.

John reminds us that Jesus is the Word made flesh, the Light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome Him. Isaiah tells us to "arise and shine" because our Light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon us. Even when the world feels dark, God's light has never stopped shining and never will.

During Advent, we have spent time waiting for Christ, watching for His presence, and waking our hearts to the wonder of His coming. Today, let's rejoice that the waiting is over! God didn't just send us a message of hope; He sent us Jesus. He came to dwell among us, bringing light. As we gather with family, friends, and even our beloved pets, may we remember that the greatest gift under the tree isn't wrapped in ornate paper with a bow on top. It's the gift of a Savior who came to bring hope, love, and everlasting light. Long after the decorations come down and the excitement of Christmas fades, His light will forever shine.

Reflection Question:
• How can your family carry the Light of Christ beyond Christmas and share His love with others?

Merry Christmas, everyone!

–ANNABELLE PRICE

MUSIC SELECTION:
"Joy to the World" Tabernacle Choir
Listen here: t.ly/6wir4

Rise, Shine
FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME

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