

2021 ADVENT
M *devotional*





'Tis the Season

Ad·vent /'ad,vent/

the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event

Hope

Who have you seen today? Who have you thought about, talked to, connected with? Who have you passed as you walked, shopped, or went about your day? We ask because we're wondering. . . who in your life needs the gifts this season brings? Who needs *an experience* with the gifts this season brings? An experience. . . with Jesus?

Faith

Joy

We've thought about you. And our guess is that you, much like everyone you know or pass by, could use a few more breaths of hope and faith this year. A few more moments of joy and peace. A few more encounters with the Light of the World. And that's our heart in sharing these writings with you: that you might find a few times each week of this Advent season to sit with our Lord and ponder anew the gift He is to you.

Peace

Light

Ministry Architects

week one

Hope

hope /hōp/

a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen



"AND IT CAME TO PASS..."

read: Luke 2:1-20

"And it came to pass..." I know it's only just the first week of Advent, so why am I going straight to the punch line? Well, it's not like I'm ruining the ending ahead of the big reveal, right? I mean, we know the story by heart in our line of work. So, here's what I'm thinking:

"And it came to pass..." are words that bring me great joy in this reading from Luke. Some people don't feel the Christmas spirit until "The Night Before Christmas" is read. For me? It's these five words.

"And it came to pass..." instantly transports me to a choir loft in Boulder Hill, IL. I was in 1st grade and the children's choir was singing a short Nativity musical. I bet you can guess the opening words. Because of those songs, I've stored those eight verses in my heart for a lifetime.

"And it came to pass..." is said twice in Luke's narrative. It grabs us right at the beginning and, if we dare think there's nothing more to pay attention to, the phrase is repeated after the Multitude shimmers back into Forever. The shepherds knew that whatever happened, they needed to see it. So, they deserted their fields, running all the way, until they saw this thing that had happened. Spreading the news throughout town with infectious joy and praise, the shepherds returned to their sheep just where they left them.



(I mean, I don't KNOW that the sheep didn't meander. I just think we serve a God who probably took a shift that night in their absence.)

"And it came to pass..." is a charge for us, too. This Advent 2021, our team has work to do. Church pastors, staff, members, students, children, etc., are hurting. It's been a hard two years and we get to be the shepherds: sharing our joy, hope, love with churches that need to know this, too, shall pass.

STEPHANIE CARO

A GLIMPSE



To my horror, the small, one inch radius, quarter circle window from my shower to my front yard is made of clear glass. Now, it is about twelve feet high from the ground outside, should anyone intend to catch a glimpse, but still. . . it's a little unsettling. Encouragingly, the only view I have from this small window are the tops of two trees, oak and pine, in the yard across the street.

Now, to everyone's (my) relief, as the hot steam from the shower condensates, the window does become opaque (and I am finally able to relax). A few days ago, however, the foggy window gave me a blurred view of the orange of the oak, the last remaining green of the pine, and the bright blue of the Carolina sky. Squinting, I thought, "that must be really beautiful." And that thought led me to think about hope. And then about the church. And then about Christmas.

See, in that moment I wondered - if I had never seen the green of a pine tree juxtaposed against the orange of an oak against the backdrop of a Carolina blue sky, would I have ever thought that it might be beautiful? Would I know that, hidden by the cold fog, there were colors and textures and movements that I couldn't fully discern - but that might be breathtaking?

No. Because it's the glimpses I've had in the past that allow me to anticipate the beauty that will be.

Which led me to another thought, later that day. As I drove down the little streets of my little town, the golden, late-autumn leaves fell all along the road in a steady breeze, catching the sunlight and literally sparkling like true flakes of gold, spinning, dancing as far as I could see. And I wondered about streets of gold. I wondered how on earth (or in Heaven) could anything be more lovely. And then, I longed for the thing I couldn't imagine.

See, I didn't need streets of gold until I could glimpse them. I didn't need a view of the perplexities and contradictions of fall in the South until I glimpsed it through a cloudy window.

And that's what hope is, right? A glimpse?

If all of this - all of this broken, hopeless world, awaiting the Kingdom here and now - if this is all glimpses of Heaven through a shower window, then I think we need more glimpses.

And that's what Christmas is. Christmas is a glimpse at Heaven. It's a glimpse of a good God with a good Son who loves an almost good world. In fact, He called us good once. And He said we'd be good again.

The church gets to bring glimpses to this broken, hopeless world. We get to wrap sad hearts in swaddling clothes. We get to sing into a dark night, announcing the arrival of a Savior - Yes, the Messiah, the Lord. We get to bring gifts and gather round mangers. We get to bring hope to the hopeless.

So, go. Give them glimpses. Celebrate your traditions. Sing, light candles, fill the sanctuary with poinsettias, bless the world. But, while you're at it, give yourself a moment to be present. Don't let yourself squint at all that ceremony and think, "that must be really beautiful." Experience that beauty. Live every second of that beauty. And hope. Because this isn't nearly as good as it's gonna' be. But it's a glimpse of it.

BRANDI KIRKLAND

MARY & HOPE

I've always been captivated by the way in which Mary, the teenage unwed mother of God, responded when she was brought the news that she would literally bring forth the long-awaited HOPE of God to the people of God. Because I'm a guy, and incapable of bearing children myself, I have little idea of how I would respond had the angel come to bring me those "glad tidings." But Mary's reply, the song she sings to Elizabeth, let's us in on how she was able to receive this news with such HOPE. Take a moment to **read Luke 1:26-55** and then see if this acronym makes sense to you too.

H Her-story. Though a play on words, I'm talking about her history (and the history of her people). All throughout the Magnificat (what we call this song), there is the use of past-tensed verbs which declare many of the ways that God **has** cared for His people, **has** shown up to meet the needs of His people, and **has** fulfilled the promises he makes to His people. God has been faithful; why would He stop now!

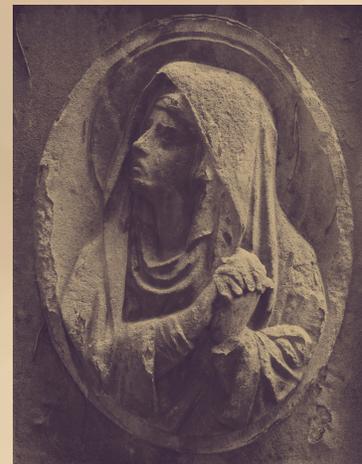
O Openminded. I'm fairly certain that Mary and her people would have never, in their wildest dreams, imagined that God would send His son into the world through a young, poor, unwed girl. All of the scripts that she had likely considered for the salvation of her people were likely void of her involvement. Yet, God can reveal His salvation through whomever, and by whatever means, He chooses.

P Purpose. Mary may have very well been asking God, "Why did you create me? What will I be when I grow up?" These are questions that a lot of teenage kids ask. And, maybe God offered this response. "I'm not going to tell you what kind of job you're going to choose in the years ahead, but you'll be doing it as a 'side gig' to being the mother of God. Your vocation, or call, will be to bring forth the Good News of God to your family, to your community, and to the world! As a sidenote, I'm wondering if maybe that's what God is telling us, too.

E Expectation. What I know about being an expectant parent is that from the moment you find out you're going to have a child, you begin to dream about the future of that child. While there may have been some fear in Mary's soul, her response to the angel in verse 38 sounds to me like, "God! Bring it on! This is going to be a wonderful ride and I cannot wait to get started!" Mary welcomed the opportunity to serve the Lord, and was filled with wide-eyed expectation for the road ahead.

As we approach the coming of Jesus again this Christmas, I pray that you'll be able to sense the coming of a long-awaited promise, that you'll allow this Christmas to come in it's own unique way, that you'll claim your responsibility to bring forth the HOPE of Jesus, and that you'll be filled with a Holy anticipation as you wait! Amen.

BRENT PARKER



week two

Faith

faith /fāTH/

complete trust or confidence in someone
or something



HAVE YOU FOUND JESUS?

I'd never met the woman, but still, I had to ask:

"Have you found Jesus?"

"I'm sorry?" she said.

I understood her confusion. It's not a question you get asked very often in her line of work. "I'm wondering if you found Jesus," I said. "We think we left him on your plane."

It was my fault really. We were flying from Tampa to Wichita for Christmas in 1995, and I thought it would be a good idea to entertain our two-year-old with a little toy nativity set we brought from home. It didn't take long before donkeys and sheep were scattered on the plane floor and wise men were stuffed between the seats.

It wasn't until we got to Wichita, though, that we realized the manger was empty. And that's why I was explaining to the woman on the other end of the phone that we had lost Jesus.

"OK. What flight?" she asked.

Delta customer service reps - like pastors - are trained to offer a non-anxious presence. She just gathered the necessary information, checked the lost and found records, and let me know that no, they had not found Jesus. But she hoped we had a good Christmas anyway.

Of course, so many people do, right? Jesus is missing, but they have a terrific Christmas anyway. Then we Christians, being the holy ones, get mad. "Put the Christ back in Christmas, dangit," we say. "Christmas is all about the love of Jesus, you bunch of morons."

I wonder if that does any good - for them or for us. There must be a better way to manage the problem.

By the way, when we got back to Florida, we found out that Jesus had been in our own home all along. Delta hadn't lost track of Jesus; we had.

Maybe that's the solution to our other problem, too. Maybe Christians are the ones leaving Jesus behind. We might have him in our homes, but we leave him there when we go to work, when we get stuck in traffic, and when we encounter people who don't know him like we do.

I wonder what would happen if our relationship with the living Christ made us noticeably different - more joyful, more loving, less angry - during the other eleven months of the year. If we Christians put the "Christ" back into January through November, I have a feeling the world would be more eager to put him back in Christmas.



JEFF DUNN-RANKIN

***Oh come, all ye faithful. Joyful and triumphant.
Oh come, let us adore him. Christ the Lord. Amen.***

RARE WAS THE SUNDAY

read: Colossians 1:15-23

Growing up, there were two things my younger sister and I had to do: take piano lessons and go to church. Rare was the Sunday we weren't seated in worship or running down the halls of Grace Church to get to our Sunday school class. Our mom was a single mom long before she and my dad divorced, and that church community was our second family. When we needed a place to land before or after school, when we were raising support for mission projects in college, through so many life moments that have happened since we've lived in that town - that church has continued to show up. And those experiences in that community, and that foundation my mom laid for us, set me on a path of faith that I haven't been able to veer from since.



In the decades that have passed since those formative years, I've studied and researched alternatives to this invisible God we claim exists, I've experienced multiple other churches, too, and wrestled with the wonderings of what church is really supposed to be. Through all that, here's what I know: **I can't live without Jesus.**

What Paul writes in Colossians is true: Jesus is supreme. A day doesn't exist in my life where I'm not talking to Him or thinking about Him or considering His Kingdom and how to live on earth as it is in Heaven. He's the light in dark places, the peace that passes all understanding, the hope that is eternal. A teacher, guide, friend, and Savior - He is the visible to the invisible. And as a lifelong knower of Him, my story wouldn't be the same had a people in a small town all those years ago kept their faith to themselves.

Being well-acquainted with the language, liturgy, and lessons of the church *can* connect a person with God. But, I'm convinced, that's not enough. That's simply not enough to compel a person to devote their life to following Jesus. He must be unmistakably central in all we do and say - because He *is* unmistakably central.

There will be new faces entering church spaces throughout this whole Advent season. They might show up out of curiosity. They might show up because someone they love has invited them. Why they're there doesn't matter as much as what they experience. Why they're there doesn't matter as much as how the church shows up - and shows Jesus.

I pray rare is the Sunday when someone struggles to encounter God in your world. That you, too, might shine His light in dark places and bring His peace wherever you go. That your teaching, guidance, friendship, and presence helps make the invisible visible, too.

RENÉE WILSON

HEART CHECK

Before we enter week three of this Advent season, we want to encourage a day built more around personal reflection than reading from another. We hope you find these questions raise in you a heightened awareness of your presence, God's presence, and the presence of others in the coming days.

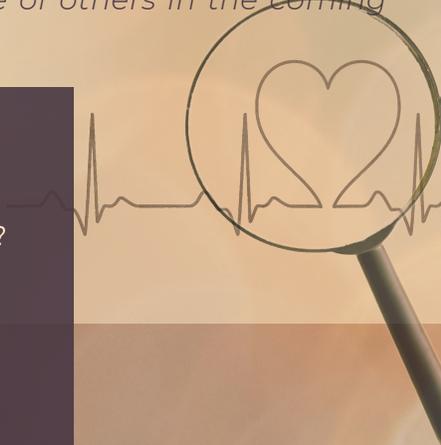
YOUR SURROUNDINGS

How would you describe **the state of the world** you're existing in these days?

What impacts your **moods**?

What impacts the way you make **decisions**?

What influences your **views** of the people, places, and possibilities around you?



YOUR MINUTES

How do you spend **your time**?

Where is there intentional **rest** in your days?

Where is there intentional **connection** in your days?

What helps you be **prepared** and be **present** for those around you?

YOUR PEOPLE

Who are the people who **matter most** to you?

Who in your life do you get the opportunity **to care for**?

Why do you **choose** to do this?

Who cares for you?

When was the last time you **let yourself be cared for**?

PSALM 36:5-9

"Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep.

You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.

How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."

week three

Joy

joy /joi/

a feeling of great pleasure and happiness



WAITING

"I don't want to wait until tomorrow," my three-year-old said.

Waiting is something we are all in the middle of in some form.

We wait for packages to arrive. We wait for pizza delivery. We wait for the auto mechanic to return. We wait for news from the surgeon. We wait for a loved one to let us know they've returned home. We wait for family to arrive. We wait for dinner to be completed. We wait in lines. We wait to checkout. And this year, we're waiting for the pandemic to end and for life to return to something that was once familiar.

Some people might suggest, "Good things come to those who wait." And sometimes they do. Yet, according to Tom Petty, "Waiting is the hardest part." And this is often true, too. Occasionally, we experience these two statements at the exact same time and, other times, they're nothing more than frustrating.

One thing is for sure, we wait. All of us wait.

In the season of Advent, we are encouraged to wait with joy. **It's how we wait that matters.** It demonstrates our faith and lowers the anxiety in the lives of those around us. And, in December 2021, we can all use a little less anxiety.

In Psalm 27, David ends the passage by expressing that the goodness of God will be seen in this life. And then, almost as if he's reminding himself, he writes, "Wait on the Lord."

Or look at Lamentations 3. In these verses we're reminded that the Lord is enough and that God's goodness comes to those who wait.

Though Jesus is already here, Advent is a season full of waiting.



This third week of Advent is focused on joy.

How do we find joy in Advent?

It's a simple answer.
We wait on the Lord.

BRYANT JOHNSON



JOY, PAIN, AND HOPE IN ADVENT

“The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear,” says a very energetic Will Ferrell in the holiday blockbuster, *Elf*.

Yet, what if Christmas cheer is not helpful this time?

What do you do when joy is not easily found around the holiday season?

I promise I’m not trying to “Bah Humbug” on your holiday cheer if you have it. Still, I also want to acknowledge that the holiday season can be challenging for some, especially this year.

This week, on the 15th, to be exact, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, will be gathering for a Blue Christmas service. We will sing together, cry together, pray together, and be the church for those who are struggling. We will acknowledge loss and pain and grieve, whether it is the loss of income, a relationship, or a loved one. And, in the spirit of Advent, we will also acknowledge that pain is temporary and that we hope in the one who brings redemption.

If this season brings about feelings of pain, anxiety, and hurt, know that you are not alone. Jesus, the Christ, meets you in your hurt. Jesus knows your pain and will journey in it with you through redemption. May hope guide you from mourning into dancing again.

Child of God, you are loved,
and through the grace of God,
you are enough.

WERNER RAMIREZ

***“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
Psalm 34:18***

FULL AND FILLED

"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." - Romans 15:13

If joy were a currency, how's your bank account looking this year? For ministry leaders, there is often a high contrast between the joy we experience during the season leading up to Christmas and the joy experienced by our congregation members as they celebrate the birth of Christ. One of the things that will enable you to avoid ministry burnout is your ability to keep your joy account full, especially when large events on the calendar loom over you and the expectations of your people are shaped by the rose-colored glasses of nostalgia.

In moments where you're running low on joy, it's important to remember that God wants to fill your account to the point where you can let it generously overflow into the lives of those around you. So, **how do you replenish your joy account when it's running low?** Sometimes, we just need to be reminded that we get to experience sacred moments when we create sacred moments for others. What can sometimes feel like tasks on a calendar are actually actions that have the potential to create a connection between your congregation and God's divine presence. The work you're doing will have ripple effects throughout eternity and, because you made it through this last year when others walked away from their call to ministry, you have the opportunity to experience the sacredness of creating Christmas memories for others.

The next time you start to feel wary from ministry during the holiday season, take a moment and remember what kinds of things bring you joy most and ask that God might give you an opportunity to refill your joy bucket with one of those things. And, in the meantime, trust that God has joy waiting for you around the corner - so much that you can't help but share it with others.

**Heavenly Father,
With Christmas drawing near, I confidently ask that you fill me with the kind of joy that only comes from you. When I become burdened by things that I cannot control, remind me of the hope I have in you and grant me peace as I trust in you more fully. Thank you for the hope we are reminded of during the Christmas season - help me experience an overflowing amount of hope this week, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

week four

Peace

peace /pēs/

freedom from disturbance; tranquility



PEACE IN THE WORLD

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." - John 14:27

I recently discovered the story of Sadako Sasaki. Maybe you know it. She was two years old, living in Hiroshima, at the time the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945. She survived, but was exposed to radiation, and, after a relatively healthy childhood, became sick and was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of twelve. Given only a year to live, in the hospital she learned of the legend of the peace cranes. The legend says if someone folded one thousand paper cranes, they would be granted a wish. Before her death, a few months prior to her thirteenth birthday, she had folded over 1300 paper cranes, using any material she could find in the hospital.

Though she didn't survive the disease, and her wish did not come true, her belief in peace inspired friends and schoolmates. They wrote letters and raised money to build a memorial in honor of Sadako and all the children who had died from the effects of the atomic bomb. Because of Sadako, the paper crane has become a symbol of peace, as they continue to be folded to this day by individuals and groups around the world. The paper crane is a tangible way to express a desire for peace on earth.

I think this peace is the same peace God wants in our lives and the world. The stories are similar. God's peace came to us in a child, a baby in a manger, born to two teenage parents in Bethlehem on that first Christmas morning. And that story was shared, again and again, and the message of peace eventually spread to all people, across this entire planet. That child grew up, lived a life of peace, and ultimately gave his life so that we might know, have, and offer this peace. Which might be needed more now than ever.

So, in this Advent season, may the story of Sadako, and the birth of Jesus, remind us of how peace starts small but, because of you and me, can continue to grow until it changes all of us, for all time.



*"This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace in the world. Amen."
-from the plaque on the statue of Sadako holding a golden crane,
in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park*

BREATH OF LIFE

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you." -2 Thessalonians 3:16



We are such doers and creators in our daily lives. I'm grateful for the reminder that I'm not the doer, creator, or manufacturer of my own peace. I can create a sense of calm for a few minutes through breathing exercises, or meditation, or yoga, but that isn't the same quality as the lasting peace that comes from the Lord.

As you think on peace, remind yourself that you are the receiver of peace, and there is no pressure to make that happen. Allow the Lord to show you how to take on a receptive posture when it comes to the peace that only the Lord can give.

ANNETTE SAFSTROM

PEACE & JUSTICE

read: Luke 2:14 & Colossians 3:12-15

When you stop to think about the word “Peace” what images come to mind? If you’re like me, thoughts of tranquility, calm, stillness, and quiet might bubble up. Fact is, though, the word peace in the Bible probably has a different connotation. The Hebrew word Shalom is what translates to peace, and Shalom doesn’t mean any of the things many associate with the word peace today. Shalom can be defined as wholeness, completeness, welfare, and prosperity.

Colossians 3:12-15 is my favorite passage in the Bible. It’s about unity, reconciliation, togetherness, and peace. Yet the peace in the Bible isn’t passive. God’s peace—Jesus’s peace—the peace he leaves with us—isn’t neutral. It’s active, and it requires attention.



The times we’re living in today aren’t unlike tumultuous times human beings have experienced in the past. The last two millennia have been fraught with war, plagues, famine, etc. Peace isn’t something new that people have wished and hoped for. We all want it! But what is it, really?

Perhaps you’ve seen the signs that read, “No Justice, No Peace; Know Peace, Know Justice.” Well, I’m pretty sure Jesus would agree with both those sentiments. Jesus was born and showed us how to live. And hoping for peace is fine, yet working toward peace is justice work. If there are people on earth who are suffering, then peace work is welfare work.

In this Advent season, may we be ever mindful of and responsive toward those whom Jesus would have protected and served: the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden.

We can’t know peace fully unless we’re striving for equity and justice for all—for we are all beloved. Christians cannot and must not strive for peace for themselves without being mindful of others. Peace isn’t a selfish endeavor. It wasn’t for Jesus, and it can’t be for his followers.

MELISSA RAU

week five

Light

light /līt/

the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible



LIGHT OF THE WORLD

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." - John 8:12

I am the light. . .

Jesus is the light.

I **AM** the light. . .

Jesus is the great I AM.

I am **THE** light. . .

The ONLY light; the ONLY way; the true path.

I am the **LIGHT**. . .

"His light doesn't make the darkness any less dark; it just conquers every shadow with something stronger."

. . .of the **WORLD**.

**The Light for ALL.
NO ONE is exempt from the Light.**



On the next page is a prayer from *Cloth For The Cradle*, by the Wild Goose Worship Group (pp. 92-93). May it ever increase the light of our Lord in your life during this Christmas season.

A PRAYER FROM *CLOTH FOR THE CRADLE*

When the world was dark and
the city was quiet, you came.

You crept in beside us.

And no-one knew.
Only the few who dared to
believe that God might do
something different.

Will you do the same this
Christmas, Lord?

Will you come into the darkness
of today's world; not the friendly
darkness as when sleep rescues
us from tiredness, but the fearful
darkness, in which people have
stopped believing that war will
end, or that food will come, or
that a government will change,
or that the Church cares?

Will you come into that darkness
and do something different to
save your people from death and
despair?

Will you come into the quietness
of this community,
not the friendly quietness as
when lovers hold hands, but the
fearful silence when the phone
has not rung, the letter has not
come, the friendly voice no

longer speaks, the doctor's face
says it all?

Will you come into that darkness,
and do something different, not to
distract, but to embrace your
people?

And will you come into the dark
corners and the quiet places of our
lives?

We ask this not because we are
guilt-ridden or want to be, but
because the fullness of our lives
long for, depend on us being as
open and vulnerable to you, as you
were to us, when you came,
wearing no more than nappies,
and trusting human hands to hold
their maker.

Will you come into our lives, if we
open them to you and do
something different?

When the world was dark and the
city was quiet, you came.

You crept in beside us.

Do the same this Christmas, Lord.
Do the same this Christmas.

AMEN!

SAFER TO HIDE

**"You are the light of the world.
A city built on a hill cannot be hidden."
Matthew 5:14**



Growing up in Colorado, I loved looking at the mountains through my bedroom window. In the daytime, the browns and the greens mixed together over the jagged points of the Rocky Mountains, creating a view that dominated the skyline – and my memory, to this day. But the real beauty came at night, as the sun dipped behind the western peaks, and the lamps of the small houses and towns along the eastern slope created a brilliant pattern of light across the darkened mountains.

When Jesus tells us to be lights to the world, he's asking us for two things. The first is to be visible. The thing about a city on a hill is that it can be seen for miles around. The lamps that light the city's paths at night also mark the city at a distance. Like the twinkling lights that lit up the mountains of my childhood, we are called to show the way to people who are wandering in the dark. "Come this way," our lights say, "you'll find safety and love here." The other thing that Jesus asks, though, is harder. He asks us to be vulnerable. The thing about a city on a hill is that. . . well, it can be seen for miles around. In days gone by, invading forces would seek out the lights of villages and towns by night, marking their locations so as to make the task of conquering them easier. It is safer to build in a valley, rather than on top of a hill, so that the light is blocked by the landscape. It is safer to hide.

But our God is not a God who hides. Our God came down, was made flesh – Immanuel. And Jesus asks us not to hide, too. Shining our light can make us vulnerable and in that vulnerability comes the opportunity to share a love that has transformed the way that we live in the world.

So shine your lights, friends – and rejoice in the opportunity to be seen from miles away.

God, we thank you for the light of your love that shines so brightly in the darkness of our world. Help us not to hide that light under a bushel, but rather to shine like a city on a hill, so that all who travel in darkness can be drawn to a place of safety, comfort, and love. Amen.

RYAN TIMPTE

CLARITY

**"The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it."
John 1:5**

Glancing out the screened windows in our little cabana, I could see the shapes of the coconut palms and fan palms around the property. I couldn't quite see the edge of the sea, though it lies less than a hundred feet from the porch. Until sunrise, thirty minutes in the future, I would have limited vision.

With the rising of the sun comes clarity. The sun allows me to see each palm branch, the footprints in the sand of those who walk the beach, the yellow birds perched in the tangled grasses. Light sharpens our focus; light brightens our world.

The word light appears over 250 times throughout Scripture. It's the first thing that God set apart on day one of creation, absence of light was included in the plagues of Israel, and it's one of the major topics in the book of Job. Light must be pretty important to God. In fact, Jesus said, "I AM the Light of the world."

Without light, our vision is dimmed. Without Jesus, our lives are dimmed. Just as the arrival of the sun in the morning brings beauty and clarity, so does the arrival of Jesus into our lives.

As we find this season of Advent coming to a close, take a moment to be grateful for the light and the Light in your life.

**Father, open my eyes to the Light that
You bring to the world around me. Help
me to see light in others, in myself, and in
my world. Amen.**

HEATHER KENNY



To connect with any of the contributing consultants in this resource, please visit our team page at www.ministryarchitects.com/ourteam

Thank you for spending part of your Advent journey with us.

Ministry Architects

