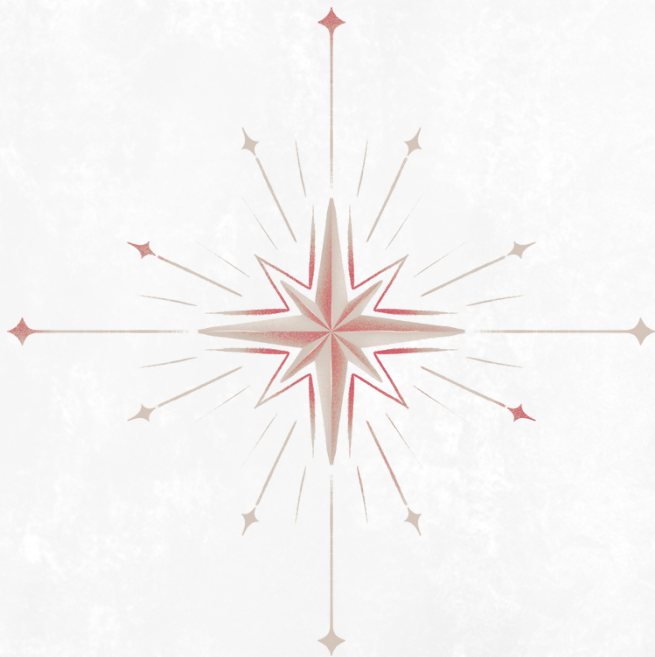


Word Light Presence Lamb



Advent Guide 2025



NORTH PARK
community church

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 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 bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

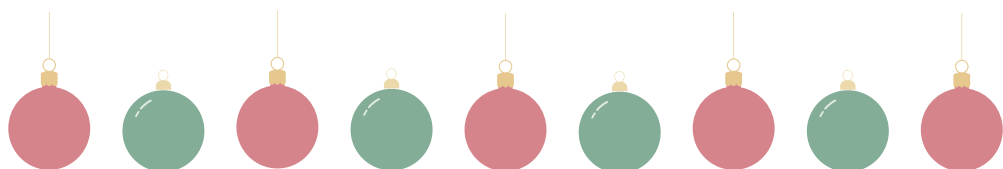
And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

How to use this guide

Advent is a wonderful time of the year in which we reflect on the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself by coming to earth as a man, as a baby, even, on a mission to save us from our sins. That is worth meditating on. Our goal with this daily devotional is to give you a starting point for worship, whether in private or with your family, in light of the themes surrounding Advent. At North Park, our themes this year are specifically based on the first chapter of John's gospel. As Pastor Luke preaches through John 1, each week's devotional thoughts will stem from the most recent message and follow the themes of Word, Light, Presence, and Lamb. On Sundays, the guide will be stripped down as we encourage you to continue thinking about the message you heard that morning. The other daily entries will include a devotional thought, Scripture, and other elements like poetry, reflection questions, and writing prompts. We hope this resource is a blessing to you!

In Christ,
The North Park Pastors



Reflect on the words of this hymn. (Look it up to sing along!)

Of the Father's Love Begotten

1. Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.

2. At his word the worlds were framèd;
He commanded, it was done:
Heav'n and earth and depths of ocean,
In their threefold order one;
All that grows beneath the shining
Of the moon and burning sun—
[Evermore and evermore.]

3. He was found in human fashion,
Death and sorrow here to know,
That the race of Adam's children,
Doomed by law to endless woe,
May not henceforth die and perish
In the dreadful gulf below—
[Evermore and evermore.]

4. O that birth forever blessèd,
When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed his sacred face—
[Evermore and evermore.]

John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

What stood out to you the most from today's sermon? Talk about it or write your thoughts here.



“In the beginning God...,” so the Bible opens. This first sentence of the book that tells the story of the world introduces us to its main character - the Creator God. The One who was already here. The One who always has been and always will be.

In other ancient creation myths, stories are told of how the world was created out of conflict, or birthed from some deity, or even from the sweat of a god. But the true story of creation begins in the most surprising way; with words. “And God said, ‘let there be...’”

This is a power like none other. The mere speaking of words brings into existence what was once only a thought in God’s mind. But God speaking does something more than this. God speaking reveals. Words are used to communicate and tell, to make known what was unknown. When God first spoke in Genesis, He was not only creating, He was making himself known.

God wants to be known, and He created us to know Him. His acts of speaking Words, of giving us His Word, and of sending Jesus the Word in Flesh all testify to His desire to be known by you and me.

Take time today to reflect on what God reveals about Himself in His Word as you read Genesis 1-2 today. Thank God that He has revealed himself as our Savior and Lord in Jesus Christ.

Genesis 1-2

Read Genesis 1-2 and record your thoughts and prayers below:



God chose an interesting character to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses had a complicated past and a seemingly inadequate skillset for leading an entire nation. Moses argued with God that his poor speech would prevent him from speaking confidently to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:10). God relented a little, allowing Moses' brother, Aaron, to be the one to do most of the talking. But Moses ended up talking plenty. Over time, he became an effective and well-respected leader over God's people. However, in one of the many instances that he spoke to the nation, he pointed ahead to another leader who would speak to all nations. The greatest prophet. Jesus!

Moses explained that this man would be just that, a man, with Israelite blood in his veins. This time of year, we reflect on how profound that is. Jesus came to live on earth as a man, a baby even. But Jesus was a far greater man than Moses. He was the perfect man. Moses bemoaned his stuttering mouth, but Jesus never stuttered. He always had the right word to say. And he *is* the Word.

Deuteronomy 18:18

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Do you have a most treasured saying of Jesus?
Write it below:



Samuel was a boy, dedicated to God by his mother, Hannah. God began calling his name, and at the counsel of his master, Eli, Samuel responded to the voice of God with the response, “Speak, for your servant hears.” From that point on, God was with him and spoke to him. Samuel let none of God’s words “fall to the ground,” and he was established as a prophet of the Lord—one who brings forth God’s word unto His people. Then, it says that the Lord *appeared* and *revealed* Himself to Samuel “by the word of the Lord.”

God has always been a communicating God. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1). Through Samuel, and others like him, God revealed His heart, His commands, His character, and His plans to His people so that they might know Him. So that they might trust Him. So that they might love Him. Yet, though God spoke and revealed Himself through the prophets, a greater Word was needed.

“But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He created the world” (Heb. 1:2).” Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He is the ultimate revelation of God, because He *is* God. So, when our hearts yearn to see God, to know God, to hear from God, to find comfort from God, to find peace with God, to receive hope from God—we look to Jesus, hear His voice and know His heart.

1 Samuel 3:19-21

And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

When you are with Jesus in heaven one day, and you see Him face-to-face, what are you most excited to hear from Him? What are you most excited to say to Him? Write your responses below.



The words of those we adore have power over us. Recall when you spent time apart from your spouse, a grandchild, parent, or close friend. How strong was your desire to hear their voice again or receive “word” of how they have been? We love to hear the words of those we love.

The Psalmists often wrote that way about God.

“How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (v. 103)

The whole Psalm reads as someone deeply committed and resolved to love and obey God’s Word. The problem is that no one actually longs to hear from and obey God; not truly and completely. The Bible tells us this in Romans that, “No man seeks after God.” Psalm 119 is written to show us the ideal, the standard. It is how we ought to be all the time. But no one has ever met the standard. That is until the Word himself became flesh and dwelt among us.

Only Jesus can truly say,

“I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.” (v. 30)

“I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.” (v. 47)

“I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.” (v. 60)

Because Jesus loved and obeyed God’s Word perfectly, we can be forgiven for how we don’t. In the gospel, Jesus takes our punishment for our disobedience to the Word and He gives us His perfect obedience to the Word. He accomplished this through His perfect life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection.

Psalm 119

Spend some time reading from Psalm 119. Take time to thank God for His Word, for the Word, and for your salvation.



In the book of Jeremiah, God describes his word as a fire and a hammer. God's words have tremendous *power*. In its context, this passage of Jeremiah is talking about the powerful judgments that God was making on the nations, things which would surely come to pass. But in general, because he is all-powerful, God's words are always potent. Through another major prophet, God said, "My word will not return to me void" (Isaiah 55:11). Nothing can stand in the way of the word of God.

How curious it is that when sending his powerful Word in the flesh, he took the form of a little powerless baby. Yet, he went on to live a remarkable and sinless life, then died, rose on the third day, and ascended to heaven. God's Word did not return to him void. He returned with a blood-bought bride on his heart. And he will return again to claim her!

God's word, his intent, his actions, bring universe-shaking results. Even though the beginning is seemingly small and insignificant.

Jeremiah 23:29

*Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord,
and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*

What other passages come to your mind, describing the power of God's word? Write them down:



What we do...

Sing aloud! Shout! Rejoice and exult with all of our hearts! We are God's people and sing and rejoice in Him! Music is how we speak with beauty. It's how we adorn our God with the words of our praise. Singing is the expression of our souls, the overflow of our hearts. Through music, we don't just communicate thoughts; we propel our thoughts heavenward with the fuel of our joy and delight in God.

Why we do it...

We sing with joy in our hearts because God has removed the judgment deserved by our sin. We sing because He has removed the danger of our enemies. We sing because the Lord is in our midst. He is with us!

How we can do it...

We can sing to God because He is a God who sings over us. His pleasure in us, His delight in us, His gladness in us is what led Him to send His Son to dwell among us. It's because God came near that we could be saved. It's because God came near that we can sing. The words in our mouths that are our song unto Him is only made possible because He is a God who sings His words over us. And His song of love and delight, His song of salvation and deliverance, His song of presence and forgiveness is sung through the life of Christ.

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;

shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem!

The Lord has taken away the judgments against you;

he has cleared away your enemies.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;

you shall never again fear evil.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

“Fear not, O Zion;

let not your hands grow weak.

The Lord your God is in your midst,

a mighty one who will save;

he will rejoice over you with gladness;

he will quiet you by his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing.

Write a verse of praise to God. Try to make it rhyme!

O Come Divine Messiah

1. O come, divine Messiah;
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph
And sadness flee away.

Refrain

Dear Savior, haste!
Come, come to earth.
Dispel the night and show your face,
and bid us hail the dawn of grace.
O come, divine Messiah;
the world in silence awaits
the day when hope shall sing its triumph
and sadness flee away.

2. O Christ, whom nations sigh for,
Whom priest and prophet long foretold,
Come, break the captive's fetters,
Redeem the long-lost fold.

3. You come in peace and meekness
And lowly will your cradle be;
All clothed in human weakness
Shall we your God-head see.

John 1:7-14

He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.



Monday, December 8th

LIGHT

“And God said, ‘Let there be light!’” This was the very first thing God created.

It takes light to see. Whether colors, shapes, depth, or movement, it all takes light. Scientists tell us that there actually is no such thing as darkness. Darkness is simply the absence of light. Light can be studied, evaluated, and measured. Darkness cannot. Light existed before God even created objects to emanate it. Humans, most animals, and plants can't live without it.

Just like words reveal truth to our ears, so physical light reveals truth to our eyes. Physical light also gives energy and life. The Bible speaks of spiritual light in the same way. Spiritual light reveals truth to our spiritual eyes and gives life to our spiritual lives. Spiritual light dispels spiritual darkness.

At Christmas, we celebrate spiritual light breaking into the darkness of our world, darkness we made. “Men love darkness rather than light,” John writes (Jn 3:19). But thanks be to God that, though “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...” yet “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 4:4,6)

Take time today to thank God for light and the eyes to see His creation. And thank God for opening your spiritual eyes and giving you light to see and embrace Jesus Christ.

Genesis 1:2-5

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God 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.



Tuesday, December 9th

LIGHT

What other Bible stories come to mind when you think of the word “light”? Do you remember when Moses’ face shone like a lightbulb?

When Moses would meet with God on Mount Sinai, the radiance of God’s presence was so powerful that it lingered on Moses’ skin. It sounds cool, but it freaked out the Israelites. Moses would come down from the mountain with his holy glow, and his kinsmen would keep their distance. Perhaps they grasped a sense of the holiness of God. Or maybe they thought something was wrong with Moses.

Moses used a veil to cover up his face. And Paul references all of this in 2 Corinthians 3. The veil covers up the glory. But the unveiled face beholds the glory of the Lord. Because Jesus came to earth, we can behold the glory of the Lord, and we are being continually transformed into his image. Thank you, Jesus.

You might not physically shine like Moses’ face, but do people notice a difference in you? How we carry ourselves, how we interact with others, and our outlook on life should be noticeably different because we have experienced the light of the Gospel, the glory of God shimmering in our eyes. This changes us. You might even freak some people out!

Exodus 34: 29-35

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Meditate on Jesus being *the light*. How does that bring you comfort? What darkness in the lives of those around you could you shine light into?

Joshua was a strong man who had seen many battles during Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Joshua fought against giants, known as the Rephaim, as Israel migrated toward the Promised Land. He spied out the mighty fortified cities in Canaan and had enough faith not to be afraid of them. Yet, on one occasion, as Joshua was preparing to lead Israel to march on Jericho, he looked up and saw what looked like a man, like a mighty warrior with a drawn sword in his hand. As Joshua sought to understand who was before him, he found that he was visited by the commander of the army of the Lord, and Joshua worshiped him because he was on holy ground, for God's presence was there.

Revelation 19:11-16 gives us a picture of a Warrior like this, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head is a crown. Behind Him, the armies of heaven array themselves. Here, we find that this Warrior whom Joshua encountered was none other than Jesus before He was born as a human. At Christmas time, we think of the baby who was born. We often think of Jesus as a wandering rabbi who taught and did miracles. John 1:5 calls Jesus the "light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." When Jesus was born, God pierced the darkness of this sin-sick world to overcome evil and rescue His creation.

Joshua's encounter reminds us that Jesus is a warrior. He came to do battle, but His battle was with sin and death. At the cross, Jesus went to war. When He rose, He rose as the victor. The baby we celebrate at Christmas is the conquering King. And like Joshua, we worship Him.

Joshua 5:13-15

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Reflection: Do you think of Jesus as a mighty Warrior? Does it make you feel safe and comforted knowing that He is a strong King who fights battles for us? Is there something in life right now that scares you that you need to trust Him with?



The last time we considered Psalm 119, we found it set a standard and ideal of how we are to live in response to God's revealed Word. We also found that no one can meet that standard but Christ alone, but thanks to His selfless gift on the cross, we are given His righteousness as a free gift.

But Psalms 119 reveals another important truth about God's Word and the concept of light.

The unfolding of your words gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple. (v. 130)

Here, the Psalmist tells us that God's Word, as it is learned, brings understanding. It helps all who sit under its brightness learn truths about themselves, the world, and who God is.

See, God's Word not only shines a light on how none of us meet the standard of living God requires, it's also a light that reveals God's heart of love. His light shines forth, revealing His grace and His desire to show mercy to those who walk in darkness. It is the light of His Word that reveals our Savior, Jesus Christ.

At Christmas, we celebrate the light of Christ, who gives understanding to simple minds of how glorious, gracious, kind, and forgiving our great God is.

Take time to thank God for the light of His Word which reveals to us the light of Christ.

Psalm 119:29-36

*Your testimonies are wonderful;
therefore my soul keeps them.*

*The unfolding of your words gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.*

*I open my mouth and pant,
because I long for your commandments.*

*Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as is your way with those who love your name.*

*Keep steady my steps according to your promise,
and let no iniquity get dominion over me.*

*Redeem me from man's oppression,
that I may keep your precepts.*

*Make your face shine upon your servant,
and teach me your statutes.*

*My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your law.*



“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” These words of messianic prophecy in the book of Isaiah are worth meditating on. There are three elements: the people, the darkness, and the great light.

All people are in spiritual darkness before knowing Christ. They are corrupt at heart, slaves to sin. There is a sense of spiritual *blindness*, but in another sense, they are active, willing participants in their sin. The people *walked* in darkness.

The darkness is life without God. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). The darkness is hopeless. Bleak. Not very Christmas-y.

But there is a great light in Jesus. The wise men followed the light of a star to find the light of the world. His name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The light of Jesus cuts through the darkness, a brilliant beam of hope. People are freed from their bondage to sin and filled with new life, as new hearts beat within them. What a stunning reality!

How will you share this light with others?

Isaiah 9:2-7

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

Saturday, December 13th

LIGHT

It is wintertime. It is getting darker earlier, and taking longer for the light to break into the day. We find ourselves needing to have lights on longer during the day. It is getting colder. You can feel the effect of the cold in your bones. Frost has come. No more green grass or flowers in their splendor. The wintertime gives us a picture of creation in darkness and in coldness. (Don't forget it's just a picture!)

But there will be a day, a great day, in which those things are a shadow of the past! There will be a day when "the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk...and there will be no more night there" (Rev. 21:23-25). There will be a day when darkness can't exist in it because the radiance of the glory of God will be too bright and too brilliant. There will be a day when coldness can't endure because of the warmth of God's presence and love will not allow it. Oh, what a day it will be!

That day, that great day, is a secured hope, an unbreakable promise, because of the Lamb. When the Lamb came into the world to be sacrificed for our sins, the pathway for the promise was sealed. Jesus, during His earthly ministry, said, "I am the light of the world." He is the Light that casts out the darkness. He is the Light that reveals the glory of God. Because Jesus came as the Lamb, we have the hope of seeing the glory of His light.

Zechariah 14:6-7

On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light.

Think about the light of God, His glory radiating forth upon the earth. What thoughts come into your mind? What do you think it will be like? What pictures can you think of that might help you and us think about how good and delightful it will be when God's glory is on full display in the New Heavens and the New Earth?



Sunday, December 14th

PRESENCE

Christmas is the fulfillment of God's promise of His presence. This is why one of Jesus' titles is "Emmanuel," God with us. Read aloud or sing this carol with your family as a celebration of Christ's first Advent and a prayer for His second.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory over the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
And drive away the shades of night
And pierce the clouds and bring us light!
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

John 1:14-18

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.



Monday, December 15th

PRESENCE

In the beginning, God created a world teeming with color, life, beauty, and majesty. In God's own words, it was "very good." The most beautiful landscape today can barely come close to the wonder those first days after creation must have been.

And in the midst of this glorious creation, God made a garden. But it was not just any old garden but a temple-garden. And God placed His divine image bearers, Adam and Eve, there to tend and keep it. Why would God create a temple-garden for humans? The same reason temples were built throughout history. It was for deity to be with humanity. From the very beginning we find that God always wanted for humans to dwell in His presence. Not because He was lonely, but out of love.

Adam and Eve's sin in the garden, however, cast them from God's presence. All mankind since then are barred because of our own sin. But thanks be to God for Jesus, who came as God of very God and dwelt among us. Then He died and rose again so we may enter God's presence once more for all eternity.

Thank God today for Jesus making the way for us to enter God's presence with boldness.

Genesis 3:8-15

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

*The Lord God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.*

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."*

Tuesday, December 16th

PRESENCE

The story of God guiding the Israelites through the wilderness is full of fascinating things. The pillar of cloud and pillar of fire are especially interesting. Have you ever pictured what that must have looked like? Did the Israelites feel the heat of the pillar of fire? Did it make noise?

The comforting aspect of the pillars of cloud and fire is that they were a physical display of God's presence with his people. He was visibly leading them forward on their journey. But even though they could see this with their eyes, it must have been unapproachable. The pillar of fire would probably torch anything in its path. God was present, but was a fearful force to be reckoned with.

We don't have to be guided by a pillar of cloud by day or a pillar of fire by night. We have the Spirit of God within us, leading us day by day. And we have that gift because of Jesus. Because Jesus came, we can experience the presence of God. He is no longer unapproachable. Jesus took the purifying fire that we could never withstand upon himself, so that we may freely walk with God and know his presence in our everyday lives. Hallelujah!

Exodus 13:21-22

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Google 'pillar of fire' and try to draw one of the images that you see.



Wednesday, December 17th ***PRESENCE***

Ruth was a foreigner. She came from a people who did not honor the Lord as God. But something happened in her life. She met a man from Israel, whom she married. She became part of a family. When her husband, her father-in-law, and her brother-in-law all died, she clung to her mother-in-law, saying, “Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God” (Ruth 1:16). Her faithfulness to her mother-in-law was met with God’s faithfulness to her. God’s providence led Ruth into Boaz’s field, a man who was good, kind, and just. Boaz married the widowed Ruth. He promised to care for her and to provide for her. And with Boaz, Ruth gave birth to a son. And from Ruth’s line would come David, the king after God’s own heart. David would receive a promise from God that through David’s line (and Ruth’s), a Son would be born who would be King of kings and Lord of lords. He will rule with justice and bring a kingdom of peace for all eternity. From Ruth, a poor, widowed foreigner, would come the Savior of the world!

The women said of Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer.” And this day, dear reader, the Lord has not left you without a Redeemer, either! Christ came into the world to redeem the least, the last, and the lost. He came to save those who were not a part of His people, in order to bring them into His kingdom. God has provided a Son, His own Son, who would bring God’s hesed, loyal love, into our lives, bringing us belonging, hope, and redemption. The story of Ruth is a story of God preparing to bring His presence amongst us.

Pray a prayer of gratitude for God’s redemption and love.

Ruth 4:13-16

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Activity: Draw a family tree below from Ruth and Boaz to David.



Thursday, December 18th

PRESENCE

It's been said that all our desires, when boiled down to their core, are really desires for joy and pleasure. Certainly there are countless ways people try and find it, but the search is all after the same thing.

This is not a flaw, but part of our design as humans. We were made for joy and pleasure. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, the problem is not that our desires are too strong, but too weak. "We are far too easily pleased. "We are like ignorant children who settle for playing in muddy puddles in the street when there is a beach vacation available to us. And what is that beach vacation? It is God himself!

The psalmist writes,
You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (vs. 11)

This is the promise of Christmas. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God offers us His very presence for all who put their faith in Christ alone for salvation. And the psalmist reminds us that this offer of God's presence is an offer of the thing our hearts really long for; fullness of joy and pleasure forevermore.

Take time to reflect on and enjoy your God who welcomes you into His presence as His beloved child.

Psalm 16

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;

I have no good apart from you."

*As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,
in whom is all my delight.*

*The sorrows of those who run after another god shall
multiply;*

*their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.*

*The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.*

*The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.*

*I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.*

*I have set the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.*

*For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.*

*You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Friday, December 19th

PRESENCE

When we consider the presence of God, it is hard not to think about Isaiah 6. In a vivid vision, Isaiah was quite literally in the presence of the Lord of heaven.

There was a problem. Isaiah got a taste of the holiness of God and came face to face with how utterly unholy he was. He was ready to be struck down by God right then and there. How could he, a wicked, vile sinner, stand before the most holy being in the universe?

But God had a plan for Isaiah's life. His sin was cleared in the presence of God, so that he could respond to God's call to prophesy to the people.

We were in a very similar situation. Maybe not in the throne room of God, but in some scenario, we were confronted with our sin and the reality that we were alienated from God because of it. Yet, Christ intervened and atoned for our sins.

This is because we, like Isaiah, were called by God:
He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... (Ephesians 1:4-5)

Now we can be filled with joy and peace in the presence of God.

Isaiah 6:1-7

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

Spend some time reflecting on how Jesus has atoned for your sin, and made you clean in the presence of God.

Where are the best banquets held? Where is the best food and the choicest wine found? Where is there abundance without lack? Where is there mirth and song and laughter and joy? Where is there no fear amongst the people?

These things are found at the table of a good king! This is the picture portrayed in Joel 2. Israel is gathered up as the prized possession of the Lord. The land will teem with goodness and plenty. All foes will be defeated and destroyed. And the King will be as a good Father to His people. On that day, His people will have no doubts that He is in their midst.

God came and made His dwelling in our midst when He was born a man. Yet, He was not acknowledged or praised—save for a few faithful followers. Rather, He was despised and rejected. He was put to shame. The grand reversal of history, however, is that His shame led to His glory! His shame led to our salvation! His shame led to our abundance!

And it came to pass after He was shamed, that His Spirit poured forth upon us, and we carry His presence within us always! Truly, He is in our midst! But one day, He will return and make all things new. There will be a day when we eat plenty and are fully satisfied at the marriage supper of the Lamb!

Malachi 3:1

*“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.
You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.*

*“And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*

What are your favorite things to eat “plenty” of and that satisfy your belly during the Christmas season? Go around the table listing things you love to eat, but you can’t repeat something that’s already been said! Once you run out of ideas, take time to pray and thank God that He is a God who satisfies us, not with food, but with His love and presence.

Behold the Lamb of God

We who walk in darkness deep
Now see the light of morning
The Mighty God, the Prince of Peace
A child to us is born

Behold, the Lamb of God
Who takes away our sin
Behold the Lamb of God
The life and light of men
Behold the Lamb of God
Who died and rose again
Behold the Lamb of God who comes
To take away our sin

Wanderers in the wilderness
O hear a voice is crying
Prepare the way, make straight the path
Your King has come to die

Behold, the Lamb of God
Who takes away our sin
Behold the Lamb of God
The life and light of men
Behold the Lamb of God
Who died and rose again
Behold the Lamb of God who comes
To take away our sin

Son of God (Emmanuel)
Son of Man (We praise you)
Behold (Behold) the Lamb
The hope (the hope) of man
Behold the Lamb

Behold, the Lamb of God
Who takes away our sin
Behold the Lamb of God
The life and light of men
Behold the Lamb of God
Who died and rose again
Behold the Lamb of God who comes
To take away our sin

John 1:26-34

John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Sheep live life on a razor's edge. They are fragile creatures that can succumb to death even with the smallest provocation. Sheep are dependent, weak, fragile, and mostly helpless. Make too loud a noise near a sheep and it can die from sheer fright. Worse yet, in ancient Israel, many sheep were raised destined for slaughter.

The writer of our Psalm looked at the state of the nation of Israel and saw a parallel between them and sheep.

Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. (v. 22)

Fast forward to the New Testament and Paul references this verse in Romans 8:36, applying it to the church. But Paul reminds us that, though we feel like sheep being lead to slaughter, we are not really because nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And why is this? Because Jesus was the true and better spotless sheep who was lead to the slaughter as the sacrificial lamb for us. He experienced true punishment and separation from God so we don't have to. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Take time to think God today for sending Jesus to be our sacrificial lamb.

Philippians 2:5-11

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



Jesus is *preeminent*, meaning he stands over and above all other things. He is totally unmatched in his excellence and majesty. As Paul wrote in Colossians, “he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” He is infinitely glorious and forever worthy of our worship.

However, when he walked the earth 2000 years ago, he wouldn’t have stood out in a crowd. He didn’t look like anything special. Isaiah wrote of him, “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” To those who didn’t know better, he was just an ordinary carpenter. Nothing to write home about.

He had ordinary parents. Yes, there is royalty in their lineage, but to those who knew them, they were just a young couple from a small town. Here God chose to send his Son. The *preeminent* Son of God had quite the humble beginning here on earth, born in a manger.

Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.



Wednesday, December 24th

LAMB

The long-expected Messiah, foretold by the prophets, has come! God's Word, now enfleshed. The One who created all things, now born. The radiance of the glory of God, now lying in a manger. The One who upholds the universe, now held by His mother. This is the paradox of Christmas.

God's condescension and incarnation would lead to Christ's execution and humiliation, but would end with His ascension and exaltation. This is the road of redemption.

In a manger, lay the Lamb. The babe born into the night is the Light of the world. The One who would be chased from His home, is God's presence with us. This Sacrifice, is God's gift to a dying world.

The familiar story of Christmas carries the universe's most astounding truths with depths beyond plumbing. Remember the familiar story, but with fresh wonder and awe! Remember the story, with fresh gratitude and praise. Remember the story, that is still unfolding!

Hebrews 1:1-4

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Give thanks together, in prayer, for the gift of salvation that we have because Jesus came near and made purification for our sins through dying on the cross in our place.



Christmas Day 2025

Thursday, December 25th

Read together the Christmas story.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.





