# DEVOTIONAL

## LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

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.

Isaiah 9:6

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# LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Doing devotion is an art. It looks different for each of us but consists of the same key things: growing in our relationship with God, leaning into His presence and making space for the Spirit in our lives. Devotion inherently teaches us to slow down and re-center.

This devotional guide aims to take us on a journey through Advent, making space for us to consider the hope, joy and peace of Jesus' birth. There are two parts to each week.



Firstly you will find the scripture reading for your Sunday candle lighting. Over the course of advent, for centuries, Christians have lit candles on each Sunday of Advent and on Christmas Eve. These candles symbolize the passage of time as we await Christmas, and remind us of hope, joy, love, and peace.

- Each Sunday, set aside some time, either on your own, with your housemates, or with your family. Read the scripture aloud for the week and light the candle. You can end with prayer if you like.
- Light the candle for both the current week, and the previous weeks! By Christmas Eve you should have all four candles lit.

Next, you'll notice three sections for each week: meditate, ponder and pray. You can engage with these three devotional sections throughout the week, at your own pace, and in your own way. Perhaps you like to journal, or paint, or write poetry, or sit, or discuss with family or friends. We encourage creativity as you inhale and exhale, breathing scripture, and allowing the Spirit to speak to you over the course of advent.

We have designed this packet to be used on your own, as a family, or in your small groups this Advent.

- Use it for your own person devotions
- If you have kids, use it to lead your kids through Advent
- Use the questions for discussion with your small group

## SETTING THE TABLE SUNDAY CANDLE LIGHTING AND SCRIPTURE READING

#### John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup>(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.")<sup>16</sup>Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and[b] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

#### MEDITATE

Most opposites are fairly evenly matched, and when they clash, you often cannot be sure which will win; think about it, poverty and wealth, laughter and sorrow, disease and medicine - most can exist at the same time. Movies do a good job of showing this, whether that is asking whether the Rebellion will finally overcome the Empire, or whether the Avengers can defeat Thanos, we aren't sure until the very end. Light and darkness, though, are different. No matter what you do, darkness can never overcome light. However much darkness you have, the tiniest pinprick of light will drown it out. Darkness always flees when it is exposed to light.

#### "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5

When we read that God is light, and we believe that to be true, we are speaking of something without competition. The light of God cannot be drowned out. It cannot be diluted. It cannot be dispelled. No amount of darkness can overcome the light of God. Light and darkness are not evenly matched. Not even close. God is glorious, permanent and invincible, and when the light shines in the darkness, the darkness cannot overcome it.

"I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life." John 8:12

Jesus promises that his light will be with us. It is through Jesus we can experience the light of life; life in all its fullness.

#### **TODAY WE LIGHT** THE 1ST CANDLE



week one

- Darkness, whilst overcome by light, still exists and can surround us. We can be honest about its reality and existence. How do you experience this darkness?
- During this season in particular, in which places and moments have you experienced darkness in your life? Can you point to tangible times and events?
- John uses light as a metaphor for life.
   What do you think this means in the context of John 1?
- 4. How does the idea of God as light relate to hope?
- 5. In what ways is hope itself a discipline or a practice?
- 6. How can you bring this hope into the places you feel darkness?

#### PRAY

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when He shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through Him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (from The Book of Common Prayer)

> God is glorious, permanent and invincible, and when the light shines in the darkness, the darkness cannot overcome it.

# KIDS CORNER

#### PONDERING

Have you ever been in the dark by yourself?
What happens if you have a candle or flashlight?
How do you feel when a light gets turned on in the dark?



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## THE NOT YET SUNDAY CANDLE LIGHTING AND SCRIPTURE READING

#### Isaiah 9:2-7

<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

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

<sup>4</sup> For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

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

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,

> establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

> > **TODAY WE LIGHT THE 2ND CANDLE**

#### MEDITATE

The Israelites were waiting. Waiting for a Savior. A Messiah. A King. They had been in exile for 70 years and were waiting, with God's blessing becoming harder to believe each day that passed. Like the Israelites, we wait in hopeful anticipation, and what a reminder Advent is of that wait. Like the Israelites, we wait for a future we can only dimly imagine; a time where everything is made right and good.

To me it seems incredible that the hope of the Israelites came in the simplicity of a child. The hope of Jesus is not to be over complicated or theologised out - it tells us to stop. To breathe in and out and to realign ourselves with the simple gospel of Jesus Chirst. Isaiah's writings here in chapter 9 speak those infamous words that we hear over and over again in the Christmas season: "unto us a child is born, to us a son is given ... and He will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace".

Which of those titles

In these few words the Israelites were promised this: someone who would

do you most hope for

in this season?

give them guidance and direction, who was powerful and would overcome any situation, who was for always and not

just the moment, and who would bring peace like they had never felt or understood before.

The Light of the World was coming. And He was coming to guide, shape, conquer, and bring peace for every person, and for every day to come.

Waiting well, for whatever it might be, is about this one thing: trusting in the promises and hope of Jesus.

-week time,

- 1. What were the Israelites waiting in hope for and how does this speak into your life now?
- 2. O Holy Night sings 'A thrill of hope' ... in what ways is the hope of Jesus expressed here in Isaiah 9, and in Malachi 4:2? What led the writer of the Christmas song to describe hope as a thrill?
- 3. Do you ever over-complicate the hope and promises of Jesus? Where and how might you do that?
- 4. We talk about the 'here but not yet' tension of the Christian journey. What are some of the real places you feel this tension?
- 5. Are there any margins or spaces in my life that you tend to fill with meaningless things, and that are perhaps hiding deeper longings or hopes?

#### PRAY

#### A child's prayer:

Jesus, you are light even in the darkest places. Help us to trust in you when we are lost or lonely. Shine hope into our hearts we pray. Amen.



### THE ALREADY SUNDAY CANDLE LIGHTING AND SCRIPTURE READING

#### Psalm 36:1-12

 <sup>1</sup>I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:
 There is no fear of God before their eyes.
 <sup>2</sup> In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin.

- <sup>3</sup> The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful; they fail to act wisely or do good.
- <sup>4</sup> Even on their beds they plot evil; they commit themselves to a sinful course and do not reject what is wrong.
- <sup>5</sup> Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.
- <sup>6</sup> Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep.
  - You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.
- <sup>7</sup> How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- <sup>8</sup> They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.



- <sup>9</sup> For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.
- <sup>10</sup> Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart.
- <sup>11</sup> May the foot of the proud not come against me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- <sup>12</sup> See how the evildoers lie fallen thrown down, not able to rise!

#### TODAY WE LIGHT THE 3RD CANDLE

#### MEDITATE

One of my favorite lines in O Holy Night is this one: "The weary world rejoices". It seems like such an oxymoron. When I am exhausted and weary, I do not rejoice. In fact, I'm actually quite the opposite. I throw my phone in a drawer because I can't stand to look at it, or hear it, and then I seek out the quiet spaces in my house to just sit and avoid things. Sometimes I run to distract myself. For me I see my response to weariness as one word: escape. It's as if running can help me run away from the stresses of the day, week or month. Sometimes an evening of rest can re-energize me, but sometimes weariness is a prolonged season. I can think of really pronounced seasons of weariness in my own life. What about you? I think for the Israelites it was probably the latter too.

So what gives? How does a weary world rejoice and more importantly, WHY, does it? Advent is a season of anticipation and celebration. We long for the promised Savior's return, even as we rejoice that He has already come to us! We don't ignore the realities and the trials that we might currently find ourselves in, but we do acknowledge that we live in the peace, joy, and hope that Jesus has already come to us.

#### "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." 1 John 4:9

The Spirit has already come! We long for a future of reconciliation and goodness, but we are the future-bringers! God has called us to partner with Him in his redemptive plan and we usher in the new heavens and earth alongside Him. We see the light of Jesus now installed in each one of us. This is how the weary world rejoices.

-week three

- 1. In what areas of your life do you find yourself experiencing weariness?
- 2. How do you find yourself responding in those seasons of weariness? Do you notice any patterns in your life?
- 3. "The weary world rejoices" seems like a contradiction. What does it look like to rejoice in seasons of weariness?
- 4. In what ways do we "live through Jesus"? How do you see the spirit empowering your life?
- 5. How is God calling you to partner with Him?

#### PRAY

Write out your own prayer, or maybe a prayer as a family or small group to speak over this season.



# KIDS CORNER

#### PONDERING

• What does it mean to anticpate something?

• How do we celebrate that Jesus has come to be with us?



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## A STAR sunday candle lighting and scripture reading

#### Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup>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."

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup>"'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.'"

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

<sup>9</sup>After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup>On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

#### MEDITATE

A star. Set in place billions of years before its light would ever reach the eyes of the Magi. God was searching for them. A group of people who didn't know God, but were longing for Him. Who stepped out, making great sacrifices to find Christ. Our own stories are different, but perhaps not by much! We each have a story of when we saw the light of Jesus, decided to step out and followed it to see where it would lead. For the Magi, seeing the light didn't immediately bring them to the feet of baby Jesus but it began a journey, one day after the next, choosing to follow that star and see where it led. Jesus talks about this light, the light that shines in the darkness and that guides people to the Lord. He talks about it in relation to Himself, but then He flips it and talks about it in relation to you and me.

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



-week four-

- 1. What's your story of encountering God's light? How did you find out about Jesus? What made you want to follow Him?
- 2. The Magi began a journey when they saw the star; they chose to pursue it and see where it would lead. Are there times in your life where you expect the journey to move faster than you'd perhaps like? How have you experienced this journey toward Jesus?
- 3. What is guiding your life now, in this season and moment?
- 4. What spaces has God called you into to be a light?
- 5. What does it really mean to be a light a city on a hill?
- 6. Have you ever experienced a friend or someone you know coming to faith because of your invitation?

#### PRAY

"Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen." (from The Book of Common Prayer)



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# CHRISTMAS EVE

#### Luke 2:8-14

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<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

The universe celebrates. We are still singing this song.

#### MEDITATE

Joy to the world, the Lord is come Let earth receive her King Let every heart prepare Him room And Heaven and nature sing



Jesus is born, and the world rejoices with singing! The angels begin a song that still resounds today; we get to participate along with the universe in celebrating the light of life entering the world!

So many Christmas carols and hymns speak of responding to Jesus' birth with song and praise! 'Joy to the world', in particular, speaks of this transcendent, awe-inspiring JOY. Not a happy feeling, hyggelifestyle, hallmark movie type of thing, but a deep, unexplainable joy. Whilst we have recognised over this advent season the real pain, struggles and heartache that so many of us are experiencing, we have also taken time to look to that light that shines in the darkness; that light that gives us hope and fills with joy. It's a light that saves us, shapes us and now spills out from us.

It is Christmas Eve and the wait is over! Let's join Heaven's singing.

A speck of light:

Conquering darkness,

promising hope.

#### PONDER

- 1. This Christmas Eve, how are you joining in with Heaven's song?
- 2. Where have you experienced this deep, unexplainable joy?
- 3. How can you share this joy with your family, friends and neighbors?

#### A CHRISTMAS BENEDICTION

May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of Jesus. Amen.





# HUNGER PROJECT

Each year, during the holiday season, Hillcrest has a tradition of collecting money to feed the hungry around us and around the world. Out of grateful hearts for all that has been provided for us we collect coins, bills or checks in our HP Cups and then turn them in,

during the first week of January, to the church office. Together our generosity will bless two organizations this year that count on gifts like ours to keep their nonprofit ministries going! Put your Hunger project Cup in a prominent place in your home to remind all to be thankful for the MUCH we have and to remember to contribute. Join us in being part of Hunger Project 2020 to bless:

#### **COMMUNITY CONCERN: SRI LANKA**

This Feeding Program in downtown Columbo, Sri Lanka feeds over 150 children each day! They receive both breakfast and lunch which helps them live healthier lives and enables them to concentrate on their studies in school. This will be about the 35th year we have supported this feeding program and usually our gift supplies 5-6 months worth of their food budget. Needless to say, they count on us. Our dollars go a long way in Sri Lanka!

#### ENGEDI REFUGE CENTER: WHATCOM CO.

Engedi is a local ministry that provides shelter and training for women who are trying to escape a life of many kinds of abuse. Our friends Aaron and Leah Newcombe have founded and maintained this program for over 10 years now and they have a nationally recognized success rate of 93% of the women that go through their program are able to then able to provide for themselves and live free of the bondage of addiction and slavery. Their food budget is \$1000.00 per month and we would love to bless them with at least half a year's worth of provision!

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