

**Seeds for
Celebration
for the
Jubilee!
Community**

Asheville, North Carolina

Holidays, 2020

The Season of Light

THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Nov. 29, 2020, Advent 1

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ~ Genesis 1:3

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

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it. ~ Edith Wharton

When the nights get longer, we miss the light of day. When our power goes out, we miss the lights in our house. When someone we love dies, we miss their light in our lives. We are drawn to people who light up a room with their smile. When we get a new idea, a light goes on. When we emerge from confusion, we finally see the light. People who makes us feel warm and fuzzy are all sweetness and light. When our passions get ignited, it's as if a fire has been lit beneath us. When we begin to hope after feeling despair, we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Each season brings a unique gift of light: the spring luminosity shimmering on the fresh green of trees, the summer brightness ripening a tomato, the golden glow igniting the fall colors, the slant of light across a winter landscape. We delight in the refracted light we see in rainbow or through a prism.

As the days get shorter, so many of the world religions anticipate and celebrate the return of the light. On this first week of the Season of Light, we peer at the dancing colors that the prism throws against a wall. With song and story, we watch as the One Light is reflected in the many colors of different faiths. "You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world." (Matthew 5:14, The Message)

THE LIGHT OF COMFORT

Dec. 6, 2020 Advent 2

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ... A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ~ Isaiah 40:1-6

John the baptizer ... proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ~ Mark 1:3-8

Singing it in the Messiah is magnificent: “Ev’ry valley shall be exalted and ev’ry mountain and hill made low.” But I would be devastated if these embracing mountains were made low! Of course, it’s a poetic way of describing our way being made easier. No more obstacles in our path. It’s meant to be a comfort: this hardship won’t last forever. This too shall pass. But maybe the metaphor begs the question: do we really want all the obstacles removed? The view from the top of the mountain is one you’ll never find in the flatlands.

The light of comfort comes in many forms: a warm embrace, a cozy blanket, a homecooked meal (with plenty of carbs), the assurance of the attending nurse, the shoulder that absorbs all the tears, the laughter that bubbles up in the midst of sorrow. Whether a comforting hand, a comforting smile, or a comforting meal, we all long to be comforted. But doesn’t the need for comfort imply a preceding discomfort? Like the climb up the mountain to get to the view, the relief of comfort follows a need for it.

And isn’t that just life? We don’t want to get too comfortable. Too few challenges. Too little effort. We need a little friction to keep ourselves polished. So when we see the mountains ahead, the obstacles in our path, or feel the disquiet of anxiety, can we trust that comfort lies ahead? Or know that we can be vessels of the solace others seek? As L.R. Knost wrote: “Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.”

THE LIGHT OF FREEDOM

December 13, 2020 Advent 3/Hanukkah

For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness. ~ Psalm 18:28

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. ~ Proverbs 4:18

The miracle, of course, was not that the oil for the sacred light – in a little cruse – lasted as long as they say; but that the courage of the Maccabees lasted to this day: let that nourish my flickering spirit. ~ Charles Reznikoff

The miracle of the lamp that did not burn out reminds me a little of the Little Engine Who Could. The lamp chugged and chugged for seven days longer than made sense. But unlike the train in the children’s book, the Hanukkah light burned through a time of war and loss. The lamp burned for eight days while the war lasted for many years. The faith of the warriors allowed them to light their last bit of sacred oil, not knowing what would happen next. And the long-lasting light was a reminder that God would not leave the Jewish people. They endured and eventually,

through their tenacity, freedom came. Moshe Davis said, “A candle is a small thing. But one candle can light another. And see how its own light increases, as a candle gives its flame to the other. You are such a light.”

The light of freedom shines even when the possibility of freedom only lurks in the shadows. Sometimes it’s the light we desire that illuminates how the dark still hovers. “Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness,” wrote Anne Frank in her diary. In our murky histories we find that freedom never came evenly or easily.

Whether the war outside or within, we celebrate the miracle of how the light hangs on while we struggle. And in that flickering hope lies all the possibility. “Between stimulus and response,” Viktor Frankl wrote, “there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

THE LIGHT OF LOVE

December 20, 2020 – Advent 4

Gabriel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ... For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

... And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”

Luke 1: 26-38, 46-55

In some traditions, Mary the Mother of Jesus is hailed as a saint above saints. She represents a feminine face of God for many. But before she was all that, she was a young woman – a girl really – who was faced with a great decision. Could she trust God to work through her – to use her very body – to bring God’s bright light into the world in a new way?

She surrendered to the possibilities, even though it meant hardship and humiliation and heartbreak. And because she allowed the Spirit to “come upon her” she changed the course of history. She sings a song to us of exalting the ones at the bottom rungs of society and turning trickle-down economics upside-down.

What is the Holy Spirit turning upside-down or inside-out in your life? In our community? Can we tune in and find out? It would be easier if the Angel Gabriel appeared in a flash of light and

told us what to do. Or would it? Maybe that would freak us the heck out! Maybe the spirit is more subtle than that in hopes that we won't turn tail and run away.

Another person who let the Holy Spirit have her way with him was Dr. King, who said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Advent reminds us to watch for the light, to expect the impossible, to anticipate joy and to participate in love. Oh yeah!

THE LIGHT OF BALANCE

December 21, 2020 – Solstice

This is the solstice, the still point of the sun, its cusp and midnight, the year's threshold and unlocking, where the past lets go of and becomes the future; the place of caught breath. ~ Margaret Atwood

Both the Winter and the Summer Solstices are expressions of love. They show us the opposition of light and dark, expansion and contraction, that characterize our experiences in the Earth school so that we can recognize our options as we move through our lives. ~ Gary Zukav

People throughout history have praised the sun for its life-giving light. But it is the moon whose sacred gift connects us to the rhythms of life on earth. It wanes and waxes, ebbs and flows, all depending on where it is in relation to the fiery nearest star. Like the moon, our reflection of the Light waxes and wanes. Like the moon, we sometimes stand in the full Light and sometimes find it obscured from our view. Some moments feel like a tipping point: will we stand still in the dark or will the Light in us continue to grow?

C. G. Jung said, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular."

Preacher and professor Barbara Brown Taylor wrote: "I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light."

And Shannon Alder reminds us, "The moon will guide you through the night with her brightness, but she will always dwell in the darkness, in order to be seen."

On the longest night, can we be patient with the darkness, eager, even to learn her secrets? Then we may sing with Walt Whitman, “To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle, every cubic inch of space is a miracle.”

THE LIGHT OF JOY

December 24, 2020 Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

Luke 2:1-20

... While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

“Pointing to another world will never stop vice among us; shedding light over this world can alone help us.”

— Walt Whitman

How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is given.

I would be silent now, Lord, and expectant ...
that I may receive the gift I need
so I may become the gift others need. ~ Ted Loder

THE LIGHT OF COMMUNITY

December 27, 2020, Kwanzaa

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same

way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. ~ Matthew 5:14-16

THE LIGHT OF WISDOM
January 3, 2021, Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-5

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

Matthew 2:1-12

...When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.

— *Brene Brown*

Additional quotes:

“There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.”

— **Leonard Cohen**

“How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a weary world.”

— **William Shakespeare**

“It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but that you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it.”

— **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ~ Psalm 27:1