

Holy Night

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR
THE SEASON OF ADVENT



Welcome to Advent

The nights grow longer as we prepare for the birth of Christ. Yet, we wait with patience and anticipation. Here, we invite you to examine the darkness and the metaphors we use to describe it. So often we equate darkness with danger, sin, or hardship.

We recognize the harm that a narrow construction of darkness metaphors has done. As darkness has taken a negative connotation, that can be translated to people who have darker skin. The intended and unintended consequences of this negative connection have caused great damage.

Scripture has many well known examples of light overcoming darkness or darkness representing something bad. But that is not the complete story. There are also places where darkness is beautiful and generative. But it is easy to miss such examples. The following meditations seek to expand our metaphors for darkness. We invite you to break open the metaphor, to think critically, and revel in the beauty and wonder that is darkness.

December 1

Read Genesis 1:1-5

What better place to start our story than at the beginning. We read in Genesis that in the beginning God created everything from the heavens to the earth. Yet, the earth was formless and void, empty and chaotic. In deep darkness. God's Spirit hovered over the waters of creation. This was a moment set on the precipice of ultimate creativity filled with nothing, filled with potential. Then God's voice rang out. "Let there be light" God's word is what it says it is and with a word God called light into existence. God created light and dark and every shade and color in between. God did not just create black and white in binary opposition, but so much more than that! God created the light and the dark and all the subtleties in between.

The spectrum from light to dark that God created is full of nuance from the bright shining sun to dusky shadows, from brilliant colors, to dulled hues, a continuum of illumination. God saw the light and the darkness and saw that it was good. Light and dark, evening and morning, are separate but connected, flowing into one another with beauty and goodness.

As we turn to the season of Advent we await the coming of Christ, the promised one. We wait in the generative darkness full of hope trusting that God's plan of salvation will bring us to life yet again.

Let us pray: God of all creation, of light and dark and everything in between, be with us in the waiting of the Advent season. Grant us grace and peace as we look with hope to your creating future.

By Pastor Mark Griffith

December 2

Read Psalm 121

This familiar and beloved Psalm speaks a word of hope and help to God's people. It often resonates with people who love the mountains and high places as the psalmist writes, "I lift my eyes to the mountains—from where will my come come?" These beloved words have given hope to us through the generations. When we feel in need of help or hope we lift our eyes and remember that God is powerful and is our help.

We stop at the beautiful images of mountains and help and can forget that the Psalm continues. Sometimes overlooked is the center of the Psalm. The center evokes images like God is our keeper and protector, our shade from the sun and the moon. I like to think about God being our shade or protector. Sometimes the light is too much. Sometimes we need a shade to guard us from the harm of brightness. On a hot day in the bright sun there are few comforts that can compare to the relief of shade.

In the words of the psalmist, God promises to be our keeper, our protector, a shade when we need it the most. Shade and shadows are somewhere on the continuum from light to dark. They show us that God did not simply create light and dark but everything from light to dark.

This is a subtle nuance that has tremendous consequences. The Psalmist invokes the metaphor that God will be our shade from the sun (even from the moon) and will not let harm come to us. In our Advent hope, let us find courage when we look to the mountains, let us find rest in God's holy shade, let us look together for the life of the world that is yet to come.

Let us pray: God of mountains and shadows, raise our spirits like the lofty mountains that we might feel your courage and strength. Comfort us and grant us peace in the power of your shelter and shade. Amen.

By Pastor Mark Griffith

December 3

Read 1 Samuel 3:9-11

Samuel is a special character in the Hebrew scripture. His mother Hannah was married and unable to have children. With a broken heart she cried in the temple and God heard her prayers. Eventually, she had a child and dedicated her son to life in the temple. He grew in faith and devotion, raised by the wise priest Eli. In the dark of night Eli is sleeping and hears a voice. This voice in the darkness echoes the voice calling out in the beginning of creation. Samuel, still not sure what is happening, consults Eli in the middle of the night. It took three times but eventually, Eli figured out what was happening. He realizes the voice is God, calling to Sameul. God's call often comes in the holiness that is the dark of night.

In this season of Advent let's remember together the beauty, joy, and holiness that comes in the darkness. Like Samuel laying in the night who hears God's call. "Speak, for your servant is listening." It took the darkness of night for Samuel to hear God's voice. It took the darkness of night for Samuel to reply. Then God told Samuel that a new thing was going to happen among God's people. God said, "I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle."

In Advent anticipation let's let our hearts be open to what God is doing in our midst. Let's open our hearts to the story of salvation that is still being told.

Let us pray: Holy One, we long to hear your voice. Help us quiet our minds and wait in the darkness, so that we may listen, so that we may hear, so that we may respond to your invitation of good news. Amen.

By Pastor Mark Griffith

December 4

Read Psalm 46:10

I grew up in a part of the country with a lot of limestone outcroppings above the ground and a lot of caves below. Some of the caverns are quite large and well known. A few are even tourist destinations. But most are small, on private land, and known only to a few folk. As a teenager I had the opportunity to explore and study some of both kinds of caves through a National Science Foundation summer program for high school and college students. Part spelunking (exploring) and part speleology (studying), the program gave me access to an underground world full of all kinds of wonders. One of the wonders of caving is the total darkness and silence you can experience there. I can recall several occasions when those leading us through caverns and corridors would have us stop, turn out our headlamps, and sit as still as possible to appreciate that rare experience.

Silence, like darkness, is unfamiliar to most of us. We live in a busy, noisy, hectic world. To sit in that still darkness took some getting used to. But over time, even the teenaged me became aware of how powerful and even holy doing so could be. In this season of preparation, when so much can be added to our already busy lives, taking some time to just be still can open us up to the God who is with us in the darkness and in all our times and seasons.

Let us pray: Help me to be still and know that you are Immanuel, God with me. Amen.

By Pastor Dave Thomas

December 5

Read: 2 Samuel 22:12

We probably more often associate God with light than darkness, and the Bible is full of divine light imagery. But God is present in both darkness and light, and through both God's glory is revealed.

In 2 Samuel 22 and parallel passages in Psalm 18, David praises God who has delivered him from King Saul. Maddened by paranoia, for at least ten years Saul and his army pursued David before he himself became king. The Biblical record shows that Saul tried to kill David at least five times. After he became King, David fended off surrounding enemy nations, many with greater military might. Through it all, God had protected him.

One image of God as protector and provider for David is God shrouded by dark storm clouds. Like a thunderstorm about to send refreshing rain upon the earth, this image of God "in a canopy of dark clouds" reminds us that darkness isn't always a bad omen or something to be feared. God, the "rider of the clouds," is aware of our needs and provides for us even when hidden from our limited human sight.

Let us pray: Grow my faith in you, O God of both light and dark, that I may trust you more and more. Amen.

By Pastor Dave Thomas

December 6

Read Psalm 119:105

Recently the light in the elevator at Cross of Christ malfunctioned. One day it was working, and then the next, it wasn't. Which, by the way, I found out through the unsettling experience of going into the elevator, pushing the button, and having the doors close before I noticed the light wasn't working. Friends, it's really, really dark in that elevator without a light. Thank goodness it only goes up or down one floor!

Good news. The elevator light has been repaired. Bad news. We needed a new cover for the light tube, so we went from very dark to super bright.

Even better news: As the season of Advent reminds us, God is always with us. Sometimes the spiritual light is turned on for us, and we can see God at work in our lives and in our world. Other times it may feel like we are alone in the dark.

But that's simply not true – any more than my momentary panic in the darkness of the elevator meant I was in any real danger. God not only is with us in dark places and times, but by faith we can learn to “see in the dark” as we trust God's word, full of promises to be present with us always.

Let us pray: Revealer of Truth, show me how to rely on you, that I may walk by faith and not by sight alone. Amen.

By Pastor Dave Thomas

December 7

Read Isaiah 9:2-6

In Northern Germany on the shores of the North Sea, hidden behind impassable swamps, lived the Frisians. They were poor, but proud and resilient people. They didn't bow their necks; neither to the nobles, nor to the moneybags of the Hanseatic cities. The soil was not fertile and the shallow coast with its ship devouring, ever moving sands made seafaring a challenge. Many fishermen were lost at sea. On nights when the gale forced the customs cutters to seek refuge in the ports, their swift boats set out to smuggle the goods of the orient, tobacco and alcohol.

Among the Frisians, lived a single Jew. Nobody knew where he came from or why he came. One day he appeared and stayed. When the day's work was done, he went up into his chamber, lit his lamp and studied the Torah until the morning dawned. His light, the light of the Torah, could be seen from far out at sea. It was the beacon that guided the smugglers safely through the treacherous sands back into port.

Let us pray: Lord, be with us as we navigate stormy seas. Let the beacon of your presence give us direction and purpose. Save us from shipwreck and danger. Let your light steady our course and bring us safely into the harbor of your love. In Jesus' name we pray.

By Pastor Olaf Baumann

December 8

Read John 1:1-5

On the mantel above the fireplace stands my grandfather's miner lamp. It is a bronze colored slightly cone shaped object. It is well used, pockmarked, and slightly dented. It has a patina of backbreaking labor and even though it has been an antique for more than 80 years, it still smells like a coal mine. It exudes the fragrance of burned carbon, diesel and toxic lubricants. On the bottom is the fuel tank. It feeds a flame that will illuminate the darkness for about 10 hours.

On the top there is a wire mesh allowing gas exchange. It is an incredible piece of low tech. Even though it operates with an open flame, the wire mesh prevents the light from igniting a methane gas or a coal dust explosion. The mesh allows hazardous gasses to freely enter the lamp. They create multicolored auras around the flame. The color tells the miner what gas is in the air.

It might be a volatile one that wants to explode and tear him apart, or it might be a quiet one that wants to poison him. For miners, their lamp holds a light in the darkness, that the darkness will not overcome. It keeps them safe until they reemerge from the belly of the earth and return to the surface.

Let us Pray: Lord, keep us safe on our journeys to the dark places. Make your presence known in our hearts, give us the trust that we never walk alone, but that your light shines on our path to guide us home. In Jesus' name we pray.

By Pastor Olaf Baumann

December 9

Read Luke 2:8-11

Since we emerged from the fog of history, humans have gathered around fires in the night. Hunters found respite from the exploits of the day. They shared a meal and told stories of successful hunts or of the time when luck was not on their side and the community starved. Silk road traders made camp after a long day's journey taking the treasures of the East to the markets in the West. They heard the moaning and groaning of their camels and enjoyed the warmth of the flames. They spoke of exotic places, and encounters with scoundrels and holy men.

Prophets who followed a star that rose in the East sat in silence around a crackling fire. The high-pitched bark of a jackal pierced the night like a portend of doom. The smoke of the burning wood carried their prayers to God. Under the star strewn canopy of the night sky shepherds returned to their flocks. They placed new wood on the last embers of their died down fire. As the flames rekindled, they remembered full of wonder and joy the child they saw lying in the manger.

Tomorrow's sun will rise over a new world. Fires in the night were the birthplace of tales that give our lives meaning and purpose, that connect us to the source of all being, and that prepare us for the adventures of the new dawn.

Let us pray: Lord, open our eyes to behold the beauty of your creation. Make us bold to embrace the people you put in our path. Give us ears to hear their tales and hearts to see your image in their faces. Make us bold to reach out the hand of friendship and love. In Jesus' name we pray.

By Pastor Olaf Baumann

December 10

Read 1 Kings 3:5-10

In Scripture, dreams are a way God or an angel/messenger sent on God's behalf, connect and converse. Solomon, in a dream by night, has such an encounter with the divine. Who else do you recall meeting God or messenger by way of a dream in the night? Perhaps Daniel, Joseph (Jacob's son), Mary, or the dreamer of Revelation come to mind. What is it about the darkness that creates opportunity for the divine to speak to us?

When we close our eyes, we enter a world of darkness. Dreams come when we close our eyes. That darkness is meant to quiet our minds. The act of closing our eyes takes away one of our senses, minimizing distractions so we can focus our attention. This is why we often teach children to close their eyes when they pray and continue this practice throughout adulthood. Closing our eyes prompts a re-set of our mind.

This is why, when I begin worship each Sunday, I invite the congregation to close their eyes and take a deep breath. It is a simple practice of centering so that we all can be present to listen to the Spirit at work in, through and among us. Does it always work? I wish! Even so the possibility is there when we close our eyes for the gift of blessed darkness to win. A gift of rest – we can finally let go and be in the darkness. I receive this letting go as a true gift from God. It opens up the opportunity for God to speak truth – grace, welcome, reconciliation. This Advent, take time to close your eyes, breathe deeply and listen for the Spirit to speak.

*Let us pray: As we close our eyes we welcome the darkness and the rest it can provide. As we close our eyes we welcome your Spirit to speak as you have to your people for centuries. Help us to listen and pay attention to your word of truth – words of promise for me and for all people.
Amen.*

By Pastor Krista Johnson

December 11

Read Psalm 139:13-15

A mother's womb; the depths of the earth – both places of deep darkness – hiddenness – AND places where the mystery of new life is formed. Often, when we don't understand something, we can feel threatened and act out of our fear, which can lead to exclusion and a need to protect that allows for violence. However, there are times when the mystery presented moves us to awe and wonder. The Psalmist reminds us that God's work to intimately knit us together is something we cannot fully comprehend – and yet – there is profound beauty and peace in the mystery of life. Darkness here is sacred; not scary. Darkness here is holy; not evil.

As we move through this Advent season we rest in the creative wonder of deep darkness. If you have a chance – get outside of the city – seek the tall old growth forests – find yourself in the dark and breathe deeply – breathe in the mystery that God has been, is now, and always will be apart of your life – knitting you together stitch by stitch in ways we cannot and should not comprehend. Can't get away? That's ok – close the blinds, turn out the lights of your room and rest in the darkness where life is born.

Let us pray: God, you knit me together in my mother's womb. In the rich, dark, deep depths of the earth you formed me. Thank you. Thank you for the mystery of your creative work. Thank you for the power of darkness to bring forth life. Open my eyes to see your knitters skills in the life of my family, friends, neighbors and my own life. Amen.

By Pastor Krista Johnson



December 12

Read Ruth 3:8-11

The story begins with tragedy when Naomi's husband and two sons die. Left in a foreign land with no male relative, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their own families. One goes, but Ruth stays and utters the words, "Where you go, I will go; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." Together they travel to Bethlehem. There they find a kinsman, Boaz. Naomi instructs Ruth on what to do to gain his favor and secure their future. It will be at midnight – in the deep darkness – that Boaz will discover Ruth. Boaz will take Ruth to be his wife and through their lineage the line of King David is established. In fact, Ruth is King David's great-grandmother.

This Advent, we recognize the importance of this story. We know Bethlehem is the place where Jesus is born – we know that Jesus is of the lineage of King David. With great courage Ruth puts herself in the most vulnerable position – resting at the feet of Boaz in the dead of night. Though the story seems antiquated and we could talk about the injustice towards women of this time – I invite you instead to see the holy work God was doing, at midnight, to bring together family lines that would eventually lead to the promised Messiah.

We believe that God works in darkness as well as the light. Why? Because we are people of the cross – who have seen what God can do when all hope is lost – God resurrects, restores, renews. Out of Ruth and Naomi's loss and in their vulnerability, God does not just provide basic security – God provides the beginning of a family line that will lead to Jesus. That is incredible!

Let us pray: God, help us to see your work among us in the light of day and in the dark of night. Thank you for Ruth, Naomi, Boaz and all who came before and after that led to our beloved Lord, Jesus. Truly, you are an awesome God. Amen.

By Pastor Krista Johnson

December 13

Read Genesis 32:22-29

The night of wrestling between God and Jacob has profound significance in Advent, a season of darkness that awaits dawn, a season of hope in the shadows. In the night's darkness at the Jabbok River, Jacob faces his own fears and past failings. The intimacy of the wrestling match shows us that God doesn't shy away from meeting us in the most hidden and painful places in our lives, the spaces where we wrestle with our truest selves.

Advent calls us into this tension of waiting and wrestling in the dark. It reminds us of humanity's long night before the coming of Christ. A night that is marked by struggle and questions and longing, and the ache for light. In Jacob's wrestling, we recognize an image of this longing for God's presence to break into the night. As Jesus, God does precisely this, entering our darkness and bringing redemption in a way that had never happened before.

When Jacob emerges from his struggle with a limp and a new name, he has been transformed. In the same way, Advent reminds us that God encounters us amid life's uncertainties – in our own wrestlings and fears – and renews us. God's faithfulness to Jacob that night long ago is a testament to God's faithfulness to humanity. We can trust that in even the deepest darkest places within ourselves, God is near, bringing transformation, promise, and hope.

Let us pray: Faithful God, thank you for meeting us in the hidden places of our lives and not letting go. Renew us through the transforming power of your love, that we may experience the hope and promise of Jesus in this season. Amen.

By Pastor Lara Forbes

December 14

Read Mark 1:35

When Jesus sought God in the early hours of the morning, it was a time of solace in the midst of intense activity. The day before, the whole city had gathered around his door, clamoring for healing. But in the dark, Jesus was able to be with God and prepare himself for the day ahead.

There are many nights that I'm awake when I should be sleeping. This happens often enough that I've developed a few practices to help quiet my fidgety brain in the hopes of getting back to sleep before my alarm goes off. One of those practices is what I call "praying the congregation" – I visualize where everyone usually sits during worship, and I pray for each person. When I'm fortunate enough to fall back asleep during this prayer, I pick up where I left off the next time I pray it. This prayer not only calms my restlessness, it strengthens my relationship with the people I serve and my relationship with God. I've tried praying it during the day, and it doesn't have the same impact on me as it does in the middle of the night.

The darkness of early morning (or the middle of the night) can often amplify any challenges or uncertainty we might face in our lives, especially in this season. But Jesus assures us that God is in the darkness with us, strengthening us and giving us a place to rest our hearts.

*Let us pray: Dear Jesus, as you found peace with God in the darkness of early morning, let us find peace with you in this season and always.
Amen.*

By Pastor Lara Forbes

December 15

Read Luke 23:56b – 24:5

It seems out of place to read about Easter just ten days before Christmas. Its images of sunrise and new life are a sharp contrast to the long nights and dreary days we experience in our part of the world at this time of year. But these nights lend themselves well to the waiting and introspection that help us prepare for Jesus' birth. They allow us to acknowledge the world's brokenness and need for a savior. And amid this brokenness and need, the darkness of the season invites us into a sacred place of hope – hope that begins with the birth of Jesus, but continues far beyond it.

It is this hope that nurtures our anticipation of what is to come. It encourages our excitement over the birth that brings God's promise of eternal life to us and makes it tangible. It is this hope that carries us through the dark nights of Advent, assuring us that God is at work for the healing of the world.

On that first Easter, no one actually saw Jesus begin to breathe again, or shake off the linen cloth and step out of the tomb. By the time the women arrived, the stone had already been rolled away and Jesus was gone. He had risen in the darkness. During the night, a time that often poses tangible threats to life, God's love prevailed and Advent's promises were fulfilled.

Let us pray: God of life, we give you thanks for the birth of your Son, Jesus, and for the promise of life in him. Amen.

By Pastor Lara Forbes

December 16

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6

When I was in middle school, we took a field trip to a local cave. The cave was strung with lights that were spaced fairly close, as we walked deeper and deeper under this hill. Pretty soon, after a few winding curves, we came to a large “room.” As we listened to the guide talk about this cave, and this room, they said, “now we are going to turn the light off, and I want you to tell me what you see.”

We couldn’t see anything. We were deep enough in the hill that we had reached a space where the light could not reach – it wouldn’t be possible to see in here. And then the guide lit a match. A tiny little light in the space, and we could see everything.

Now, I like to get up in the morning and leave the lights off as I move around the house; I often do the same thing when I wander around the church. There’s something about the stillness and the simplicity of the dark that makes me more aware of sound, subtle light, or even just my own presence in new ways.

Were it not for those moments of walking in darkness, the light would mean little.

Let us pray: Loving God, thank you for moments that clarify your Word and your work around me. Amen.

By Pastor Dave Schoeld

December 17th

Read Isaiah 45:3

Every now and then when I am on a hike, I get surprised by what I encounter along the way. Sometimes it's the spaces, sometimes it's the people, sometimes it's just the simple peace that overwhelms me. Have you ever taken a hike, focused on a specific destination? You can get caught up so much in the goal that you lose sight of what is immediately around you, the beauty, power, or serenity of what is right here.

God called King Cyrus of Persia to free the Israelites from Babylon. God called someone outside of the expectations, outside of the chosen community, to answer the call. The promise made to him is this – “I will give you the treasures of darkness...hidden wealth of secret places.”

Cyrus is both promised the treasures of darkness, the hidden wealth, and he is the promise that comes out of the darkness...the hidden wealth. No one would have expected the conquering king to be the one that God calls. No one expects this man who worships a foreign God, who comes from a foreign nation, who speaks a foreign tongue, to be the mediator of God's grace, freedom, and love. But that's how God works. In people and places, in a strange kind of power that overwhelms and envelopes you, God shows up. For you.

Where has God shown up for you in surprising ways?

Let us pray: Gracious God, guide and encourage me today as I am surprised by your presence and works. Amen.

By Pastor Dave Schoeld

December 18

Read Matthew 10:27

I have, at times, been accused of being stubborn. And, well, to be clear, I am at times just plain stubborn. I am convinced that my plan of action, my point of view, is sufficient. It is easy to get stuck in the place – convinced that, if only people would listen to me, they'd go along. It's not a point of pride. Frankly, looking back it's embarrassing, and in my clearer, better moments, I know better.

My sister, Karen, was an amazing woman. She was bright, talented, and kind. When she was 19, she was diagnosed with schizophrenia – it haunted her and challenged her the rest of her life, right up until her death in 2020. There were times when she struggled to differentiate between the voices in her head and reality. And then, when the medication worked or there was a moment of clarity, she would remember her actions and spend time apologizing for her words, or behavior, or perspective – repairing or correcting what was wrong. However, if it weren't for those moments of being brought low, I'm not sure I could have heard the voices speaking of options, or choices, or direction. If it hadn't been for the difficult moments, there may have been no knowing of the better options.

Looking back, this is called many things – for addicts it might be called hitting bottom; for those who are arrogant it might be called being humbled; for those who are ill it might be seen as a gift. For the children of God, it might be called an opportunity to finally hear God speak. Sometimes it takes being in a difficult place to realize the blessings that are all around you.

Let us pray: God of peace, you are present and powerful, though sometimes I get in the way. Grant me courage to trust that presence and power today, that I might follow you. Amen.

By Pastor Dave Schoeld

December 19

Read Song of Songs 1:5

The Song of Songs is a beautiful love song, a poetic celebration of sensuality and connection between lovers. It really stands out in all those ancient stories about tribal conflict, royal intrigue, war, conquest, and exile – suddenly we find ourselves in a lush garden, and we witness the most personal thoughts, feelings, yearnings, hopes, and disappointments of two lovers. And even more unusual, two thirds of the verses are spoken from a woman’s perspective. And she is black. She says so very clearly here in chapter 1, verse 5: “Black am I and beautiful.” This translation is from the Septuagint, the oldest known Greek translation of the Bible. It is close to the original. But later, this little verse became the object of thorough scholarly discussion and dissection, and mistranslation. “I am black, but comely” (KJV 1611). or “Dark am I, yet lovely” (NIV 2011). The word “and” – “vav” in Hebrew – which connects two things, is replaced with “but” or “yet” which puts two things in tension with each other. The Hebrew original says that black and beautiful belong together. The translators say they contradict each other.

In addition, many commentators also suggest that black, שְׁחֹרָה, does not really mean black, but rather dark or swarthy. The commentator in the Pulpit Commentary suggests: “She has been living in the fields, and is browned with the ruddy health of a country life.” But no, in Song of Songs, we hear the voice of a black woman, and she is beautiful.

Let us pray: Spirit of Wisdom, help us read the bible closely. Help us lift the veil of our own assumptions. Help us discover your wisdom in the biblical texts. Amen.

By Pastor Kristin-Luana Baumann

December 20

Read John 3:2a

Nicodemus belongs to the group of religious leaders described as “Pharisees” in the gospels. Were the gospel a feature movie, the “Pharisees” would be the villains, no question about that: They distrust Jesus’ authority; they feel threatened by the power of his message; and ultimately, their conspiracies lead to Jesus’ death on the cross. Many of them feel that Jesus is directly attacking their belief system and their way of life. But Nicodemus shows us: All Pharisees are not alike. Nicodemus comes to Jesus to learn from him. But because of the constraints of his social setting in life, he comes by night, when not many people are out and about to witness his visit.

In the darkness of the night, Nicodemus listens to Jesus’ teachings. When he goes back home, he continues to think about Jesus’ words. A seed had been planted in his soul. During the Festival of Booths, Jesus stands accused by the Jewish council. In this tense and dangerous situation, Nicodemus defends him. Later, after Jesus’ death on the cross, Nicodemus, together with Joseph of Arimathea, goes to high expenses to provide Jesus with a proper burial. The seed which Jesus planted in Nicodemus’ soul in the dark, is growing into faith over time. Every path to faith is unique and valid in its own way.

Let us pray: Jesus, our teacher, plant seeds in our souls with your words. Grow our faith as we learn from you. Help us support each other in our faith journeys. Amen.

By Pastor Kristin-Luana Baumann

December 21

Read Matthew 2:13-14

It is maybe the biggest mystery of our faith, that all powerful God came to earth in the form of a vulnerable baby, born into great danger. Throughout the story of Jesus' birth, God keeps Jesus and his earthly family safe by guiding and directing Jesus' protectors through dreams and angelic appearances at night. Just after Jesus' birth, King Herod sends out soldiers to massacre all children of Jesus' age in and around Bethlehem. He wants to murder the child the Wise Men called the King of the Jews. But an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph to warn him of this danger.

Joseph immediately does as he is told. The family flees Herod's wrath, protected by the dark of the night. And so Jesus, the one whose birth started the kingdom of God, the time of everlasting peace, narrowly escapes this horrible fate. How do we long for this kingdom of God, this everlasting peace to be realized in its entirety! And how unimaginably devastating would the world be without this vision, this promise, partly realized in the birth of the Christ child already.

Let us pray: God, our protector, keep your world and all her creatures safe. Keep your vision of the kingdom of God alive in us. Grant us the will and ability to live in peace with each other. Amen.

By Pastor Kristin-Luana Baumann

December 22

Read Psalm 91:1-2

I don't often like to venture into the shadows. Too often shadows harbor creatures like spiders or snakes, the likes of which I have no interest in encountering. And how often do we associate those living in the shadows as those who wish to hide something? Shadows don't always bring up a positive image. Yet here in this Psalm, to live in the "Shadow of the Almighty" is to find refuge from all that might cause harm. Here in this shadow, one may thrive, find protection, and rest. As I read this, I began thinking of all the creatures and plant life that thrive when living in the shadow of another – bees/flowers, barnacles/whales, Plovers/ Crocodiles; and think of all the plant life that grows better in the shadows. Not to mention how we too might seek the shadows after a long time in the sun. The protection of living in the shadow of another can in fact bring life.

What might we learn about our faith and dependence on God, from those who dwell in the shadows? Think for a moment about animals that dwell in the shadows, these nocturnal animals have enhanced vision. They also develop heightened senses like hearing and smell. When we live in the Shadow of the Almighty, might we also find enhanced vision for our life, might we also better hear our Lord's call? Shade or shadowed areas increase water retention, reduces the growth of weeds, and protects plants from the elements that can be harmful. Not only are we promised refuge, shelter, protection under the shadow of the Almighty, but might it also be a place where the weeds of sin are thwarted? When we move toward the shadow of the cross of Jesus, there we will find that hope and grace abound.

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, draw us ever closer to you that we may find our rest and hope under your wings and in the shadow of your embrace. Amen.

By Pastor Nyla Schoeld

December 23

Read Psalm 139:11-12

When I was a child, I was incredibly shy. I would even hide when company came for dinner. But every time I hid, my mom would find me. Even when I found new hiding spots, Mom somehow always knew right where to find me.

Nothing can hide us from God. No veil can hide us from God. Not even the grave can hold us or separate us from the love of our Savior, who will raise us to new life. No circumstance can separate us from our Savior's love. God in his mighty love for all creation promises to be fully and attentively present even in our darkness, even in our hiding places. Because of Jesus, God comes looking for us, God in Christ comes to sit with us in our lostness because he knows what those moments of aloneness feel like. He, who when darkness came over the whole land, cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." (Mark 15:34) knows my darkness and it is not dark to him. Christ sits with me until I know the hope and promise of life that is all around me in HIM.

Let us pray: Lord in these days, when nights seem long, remind us of your presence and stay with us until we too do not fear the darkness but rather rest in your abiding grace. Amen

By Pastor Nyla Schoeld

December 24

Read Luke 2:1-7

Our Advent hope has come to this. To this night where we hold hope and expectation and look for the promise of God to be revealed. We have dared to trust in the promises of old, dared to hope in the words passed down through the generations, dared to believe that God's promise would be fulfilled. And tonight we wait for the Christ child to be born, for God's plan of salvation to be revealed.

Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem to be counted in the census. We can only imagine the stress and discomfort in their travels. Especially when they arrive and there is no room in the inn. Remember, the popular hotel chains do not exist, what is really being implied here is that there was no room for them with family or friends. Mary is about to have a baby, they are not married, and they are relatively strangers in Bethlehem. It is precisely in these precarious circumstances that God chose to be revealed in the person of Jesus.

I believe even before Jesus is born, God is revealing the story of salvation by way of these circumstances. God is not only at work in the high and lofty places through people of power, not God is at work on the margins and the lowly places. On this holy night, in the beauty of the darkness, God's love for all of creation is made known. Jesus is born, Christ is with us. The angels will rejoice, the shepherd will shout for joy, but for now we rest in the peace of this evening trusting that God is with us.

Let us pray: Gracious God, in the beauty of this holy night we give you thanks for your promise to abide with us. Christ is born and our hope is alive! May we find peace in this good news and share your love with all of creation. Amen.

By Pastor Mark Griffith

Merry
Christmas

Contributing Authors

Pastor Olaf Baumann

Our Savior Lutheran Church
Issaquah, Washington

Pastor Kristin-Luana Baumann

Our Savior Lutheran Church
Issaquah, Washington

Pastor Lara Forbes

St. Andrew's Lutheran Church
Bellevue, Washington

Pastor Mark Griffith

St. Luke's Lutheran Church
Bellevue, Washington

Pastor Krista Johnson

Mt Si Lutheran Church
North Bend, Washington

Pastor David Schoeld

Sammamish Hills Lutheran Church
Sammamish, Washington

Pastor Nyla Schoeld

Sammamish Hills Lutheran Church
Sammamish, Washington