

*Advent Devotional*  
*2020*



*The First Presbyterian Church*  
*in the City of New York*

*Advent 2020*

*Hope Peace Joy Love*

# *Advent Devotional*

## *2020*

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Welcome to the Season of Advent!

You are invited to journey with the church through a weekly devotional series created for our whole church family. As you work through each devotional, you are first invited to light the candles on your Advent wreath (if you have one), or use the paper Advent wreath found in our weekly newsletter to color in every week, and read the suggested lectionary reading for the week. The lectionary is the list of Scripture passages that many churches use to decide what will be preached on every week. The lectionary allows us to cycle through the Bible so we can read and learn as much as we can every year.

In our devotional below each lectionary reading is the focus verse which is referenced in the meditation. After you read the meditation and pray, you are invited to do a suggested activity for the week. Each of these ideas are suggested so that you might find a moment in your week to celebrate the meaning of the Advent season as we celebrate the hope, peace, joy, and love which we are blessed with this season.

You are also invited to read another Scripture reading to take a moment to pause during the middle of the week. A brief prayer is also offered for you to read and meditate on along with the reading.

We are so excited to celebrate this season together!

Audrey Webber

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# *Hope*

## *Mark 13:24-37*

*“And then they’ll see the Son of Man enter in grand style, his Arrival filling the sky—no one will miss it!” Mark 13:26, The Message*

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The song rings true in New York City. “It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas!” I know you are humming it as you read. If you look around, you will begin to see the tinsel and the lights in most storefronts. The tree at Rockefeller Plaza is up and decorated. The Macy’s window displays are ready, and the chilly weather reminds us of the season. Mark, however, begins our Advent journey by singing a different song.

In this text, known as Mark’s Apocalypse, the gospel writer speaks of a darkened sun and moon, falling stars, powers shaken, fig trees and unprepared servants. Not the magical Christmas tone we were looking for, is it?

Then again, Mark speaks loudly to Jesus’ followers, especially this year. Some of his imagery is grandiose and even scary. Some of it is routine, cyclical and even down to earth. I believe his words are grounding. As we look around us, we enter this Advent in the middle of a very different world. It is a world full of grandiose and scary images in the middle of our everyday routines. A professor of mine often asked, “where is the good news in this?” In my opinion, the good news is ever so present, and according to Mark it is not easy to miss if one is paying attention.

The gospel writer proclaims with trumpet sound that in the middle of the world we live in, Christ breaks forth in power and glory with the goal of being among God’s people. We believe that no matter how dark the moon gets, how many fig trees bloom, or how many things we face in life, Christ still shows up and does what only God can do. Isn’t that good news?

*Greg Stovell*

## *Activity*

*“And then they’ll see the Son of Man enter in grand style, his Arrival filling the sky—no one will miss it!” Mark 13:26, The Message*

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New York City is a walking city. As you walk this week, be adventurous and take a new route to your destination. As you do, look around. Really observe those around you. Pay attention to other pedestrians, vendors, workers, commuters and ask yourself the questions, “where is Christ’s presence needed the most today?” and “what can I do about it?” I pray God blesses all our Advent walks this season.



# *Midweek Reading and Prayer*

## *Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19*

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Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock!  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth  
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Stir up your might,  
and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?  
You have fed them with the bread of tears,  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.  
You make us the scorn of our neighbors;  
our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,  
the one whom you made strong for yourself.  
Then we will never turn back from you;  
give us life, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

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Gracious God, as we face a different kind of world today, we thank you for your constant reminders that you are with us. Thank you for reminders that you are greater than anything this world throws at us. Remind us of this every day. Amen.

# *Peace*

## *Mark 1:1-8*

*“...prepare the way of the Lord!”*

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I used to believe that the best recipe for a peaceful life was a well-executed plan for the journey ahead. Color-coded highlighters, multiple to-do lists, it's how I kept myself sane in life's chaos. Lately, there's been a different brand of mayhem I had never experienced before. At times, I have exuded a John the Baptist-like vibe: emerging from a “wilderness” within my home for months on end, clinging to old routines no longer feasible, dressed not in animal fur, but a conglomerate of pajamas and leisure wear, wild honey and sugary breakfast cereal, trying to make peace in a tumultuous world. It's been quite a year.

But I realize my deepest feeling of peace occurred when all my lists and master plans fell away back in March. I was left with a new sense of clarity. Quiet sun rises, my family, long walks outside, the acceptance that there is in fact, very little in this world that I can control. A bit destabilizing, but ultimately all welcomed realizations. I can't help but read John the Baptist differently now. He's a sobering reminder that we can try to create peaceful lives for ourselves but ultimately our lives are about paving the way for it instead.

How “peaceful” was your life before March? Look at the journey of Advent. That's not exactly a peaceful story either! And the further into Advent we read, the more chaotic the story gets. So what does Peace mean for us during advent? I believe it's a chosen state of heart and mind rather than a prescription for the world. Peace is a chosen state of being. When we practice confession and admit our lack of control, embrace our forgiveness and take comfort in Christ as our salvation, only then can we look around at our lives and be at peace. Advent, and our lives, are not inherently peaceful, it's about us paving the way for it until it arrives through Jesus.

*Hannah Faye Allred*

# *Activity*

*“...prepare the way of the Lord!”*

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Go outside today. Weather permitting, go on a walk to your favorite park. But on your way do the following: take a mental note of all the things you encounter along the trip that are totally and completely out of your control. The weather. The birds. Other people you may meet. And instead of letting that overwhelm you, let it bring you peace. We will never quiet the chaos around us. But that’s not what God has tasked us to do. Our job is to make way for the Prince of Peace who is coming soon. And I believe we do that by choosing to be at peace ourselves and creating a more just and peaceful world for those around us.



# *Midweek Reading and Prayer*

## *Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13*

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Lord, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you pardoned all their sin.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.  
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.  
The Lord will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.  
Righteousness will go before him,  
and will make a path for his steps.

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Dear God, remind us that peace comes only from you. One day, you will fill the world with righteousness and love and our hearts and minds will have peace that surpasses all understanding. Help us be patient for that day. And in the meantime, show us how to slow down and look to you for the order and calm we so desperately desire.

Amen.

# *Joy*

## *John 1:6-8, 19-28*

*“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.”*

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Light has always been important throughout human history. Our hunting and gathering ancestors lived by the light of the day, something maybe now only early morning snow skiers still do as they try to make “first tracks.” As soon as we discovered fire, we lit our shelters from the darkness, leading millenniums later to gas lamps to light our streets, and now the LED bulbs that barely use any energy. Darkness is shrouded in mystery and danger, the unknown because we simply can’t see. We say that those who are ignorant are “in the dark,” and for the Star Wars fans among us, those who blind themselves to evil are said to have gone over to the Dark Side.

Light as a metaphor for truth, as an image for God, runs throughout our Christian tradition. From the very first day of creation, we have God making first things first: “Let there be light.” Throughout the Bible, light provides revelation, and our collective light heals the world. And in this season of Advent, we recall that our church forebears set the date for Christmas during the Roman pagan holiday of light that marked the time of the year when the daylight from the sun began coming back from the darkness of the winter solstice. Light surrounds us as we celebrate the birth of the One who is the light for the world.

As we light the third Advent candle this week, remember that we followers of Christ are truly people of the light. Let your light shine!

*Mark Hostetter*

## *Activity*

*“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.”*

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Fill your life with light! Throw open your curtains to the morning light, string those colorful Christmas lights around your room, place candles (safely) on your dining table, walk by the Rockefeller Center tree, take in the lights of Times Square, stop and celebrate the sunset sky towards the west. We Christians are people of the light!



# *Midweek Reading and Prayer*

## *Psalm 126*

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When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

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Our God of light, fill our mouths with laughter, our tongues with shouts of joy. Even in times of trial and sorrow, your light brings hope and love. Cast away the darkness, cast away the shadows, as we celebrate the coming of the One who shows us the way, the truth, and the light. Amen.

# Love

## Luke 1:26-38

*“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

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What is time like for you right at this moment? Does it go by slowly? Has this year, especially since the start of the pandemic, feel as though it has dragged by? Or have you felt as though February and March were just a short time ago? I imagine for many of us it is a combination of both.

In our passage today, we see not only an incredible and powerful scene of incredible faith, but we see the whole movement of a passage which changes dramatically over the course of a few short verses.

From the very first verse, I like to imagine Gabriel just swooping right in like a tornado and giving this message - this crazy, unbelievable message that Mary is going to have a baby. For most of us, just the idea of having an angel come to us would be pretty amazing, but to then have this likely disturbing news might put most of us in quite a state. In all this rush, though, even amidst all of this, there is a sudden stop.

*“‘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.’ Then the angel departed from her.”*

These verses cause the whole scene to stop and ultimately call all of us to something bigger than only Mary’s story and the story of Jesus’ birth. They call us to love. They call us to realize that there is a bigger message that is not impossible but rather more important than anything else going on in our lives. All the small things matter too - what we have to do today, how we are going to pay our bills, the homework and work we have to do. But what really matters is the very being who centers our lives. That centering force is Jesus, and in Jesus we find love. If we know that, we know that nothing is impossible, and even when the busyness seems unbearable, we can rest in our God who will help us through the impossible.

*Audrey Webber*

## *Activity*

*“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

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Set a timer for five minutes and write down on a piece of paper all the things that you need to do as well as the things you want to do this week. Include everything from brushing your teeth to getting that work project done. Leave nothing out!

Now look at your list and pick out what is the most important thing you will do all week. Then ask yourself: Does it have to do with love? Is that particular task the thing God really wants you to be doing? How does it align with all the things you love doing most? Make that the center of what you do this week even as pieces of this week may be busy and others a little quiet.



# *Midweek Reading and Prayer*

## *Psalm 89:1-4,19-26*

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I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever;  
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;  
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,  
I have sworn to my servant David: 'I will establish your descendants  
forever, and build your throne for all generations.'"

Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said:

"I have set the crown on one who is mighty,  
I have exalted one chosen from the people.

I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him;  
my hand shall always remain with him;  
my arm also shall strengthen him.

The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him.  
I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;  
and in my name his horn shall be exalted.

I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.  
He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,  
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'

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Dear God, you are our rock. You are our steadfast love. Without you we have no center, and yet we know that even when we stray from you, we can always come back and re-center our lives in your indescribable love again. We ask that our love might look more like your love: Caring, Hopeful, Unconditional, Eternal, Faithful, and Strong. Although our love cannot compare to yours, we ask that you help us to love a little deeper, and to love those who we disagree with at times. Teach us to center on you today and everyday. Even when everything is always changing around us, and we don't know what may come next, we know that we can rely on your amazing love which is bigger than all of our worries combined. We love you Lord. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

# *Light*

## *Luke 2:1-14*

*"Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people..."*

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I've always had a soft spot for shepherds. Maybe it was because, in rural Pennsylvania where I grew up watching for sheep from the back window of the car, it was easy to imagine them paired with a person.

Maybe it was because their style of dress in a more rustic robe appealed to my tomboy sensibilities of outfits to don at the annual Christmas pageant. Maybe it was more a romantic notion of how wonderful it would be on a clear night like that long-ago Christmas eve, gazing up at the stars while I dozed off with my woolly companions nearby. Whatever the reason, my love for the shepherds remains. As powerful as the joyous presence of the angels and their proclamation and singing, it is the more understated response of the shepherds that compels me. This year, I am thinking especially about the response of the shepherds. Imagine it. After you are blown wide awake by the glory of the Lord and the singing of the heavenly hosts, you still have to think about the safety of your sheep, but something has just been revealed to you. Something powerful enough that you want to confirm what it is. You want to go to Bethlehem and see if you can find this baby in a manger. You want to see the kind of woman who gives birth with animals in a barn. You want to see the man who is supporting her, overwhelmed with the love of this new person in the world. You want to see this child, this one who will save people. You want to be among those who see him this soon, this vulnerable, this human. So that when he is teaching later, you will be among the crowds on the plains, on the mount, walking the road. Hearing people chatter about him, you will say, with a gleam in your eye, "Ah, yes, you know, when he was born, the most unusual things happened..."

*Barbara Davis*

## *Activity*

*"Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy  
for all the people..."*

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Pay attention to your shadow this week, when you see it, when you don't see it. Try making your shadow be more present with you (be more in the light) and try to cast your shadow in different shapes and sizes depending on the light in which you find yourself.



# *Christmas Reading and Prayer*

## *Psalm 89:1-4,19-26*

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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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

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After reading these verses, light a candle, and then pray:

In the beginning, was the light.

With your voice, God, the light gave form to the watery chaos.

The light became flesh, the light became the dome of the sky and the depth of the seas.

The light became the creatures that crawled and swam, the light became the breath that breathed into the dust.

The light was the words that named the creatures and sought companionship. In the beginning, the light was with you, just as the light is with us now.

You illuminate us, wise One. You love us.

You love the shadows we cast, you love the words we speak, you love us inside and out.

Fill us once again with your light, renew us, heal us.

Shine your glory on us that we might not only see what is in the light, what is in the shadows, but also where the light is breaking through us.

As it was in the beginning, let there be light in us.

Amen.

# *Advent and Christmas at First Church 2020*

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## *Online Advent and Christmas Services*

First Sunday of Advent - Hope  
*November 29th at 11 a.m.*

Second Sunday of Advent - Peace  
*December 6th at 11 a.m.*

Vesper Service of Music  
*December 6th at 4 p.m.*

Third Sunday of Advent - Joy  
*December 13th at 11 a.m.*

Fourth Sunday of Advent - Love  
*December 20th at 11 a.m.*

Candlelight Carols  
*December 20th at 4 p.m.*

Christmas Eve Service  
*December 24th*

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## *Online Advent and Christmas Programs*

Advent Wreath Making Party  
*November 29th at 12:30 p.m.*

Tartan Fair Visit with Santa  
*December 5th 10 a.m.-2 p.m.*

Tartan Fair Live Auction  
*December 5th 3 p.m.*

Breakfast Prayer Writing for Advent  
*Every Thursday of Advent 8 a.m.*

Spiritual Tools for Hope  
in Challenging Times  
*Tuesday, December 8 at 7 p.m.*

Family Christmas Party  
*December 12th 11 a.m.-12 p.m.*

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