

*Who is a wise man? He who learns from all men.  
-- from Talmud*

A Nobel Prize winner or a very simple down-to-earth person may be a guiding light in our lives. On a personal level, one who immediately comes to mind is a grandfather who was always there with love and wonderful stories of the "olden days".

Our Father, as we prepare for another Christmas season, let us follow the wise men as we bring Thee the gift of our love. May we be grateful for all thy blessings and may the joy and spirit of Christmas stay with us now and forever.

*When Christ was born in Bethlehem  
it was night, but seemed the noon of day.  
The stars whose light was pure and bright  
shone with unwavering ray.  
But one, one glorious star  
guided the wise men from afar.  
(author unknown)*

Eli and Eloise Krajnovich  
(originally printed in 1993)



## 2019 Advent Booklet



**First Presbyterian Church  
Newton, Iowa**

## Foreword

**For many of us, the First Presbyterian Church Advent Booklet is the first Christmas gift we receive each year. It takes many people a considerable investment of time, but is a uniquely treasured annual tradition. Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to this year's booklet: those who wrote daily entries; Mickey Van Baale, who has done an outstanding job of organizing and formatting, embellishing with clip art, and overseeing the printing; and members of our congregation who pitch in each year to collate, fold, staple, envelope, and address for distribution. It takes a village, as they say, but each and every person's effort is appreciated. Thank you, and we hope each reader will find that the booklet helps prepare our hearts throughout the advent season for the joy of the birth of Christ. May His light shine in all of our lives!**

**Val McKee**

Thoughts (and memories) wrapped in shining measures of faith and sprinkled with stars of hope -- then tied with friendship's brightest ribbons.

Fifty years ago (during the period of WWII) and one month before Christmas I was married in California ... my brother was married in Delaware. This year - 1994- my sister and I will be in Delaware for a surprise event, celebrating the golden wedding anniversary of my brother and sister-in-law - and, I will remember my wedding day, and that year -- especially the Christmas season. We were guests Christmas day in the home of a family whose parents were also lowans and not able to be there with them that year - wonderful and warm memories!

Each "Season of Christmas" - each year of our lives is a 'special' opportunity!

### *For One Brief Starry Night*

*For one brief starry night let us forget the clamor of the world, our loss, our fear. And let us light the candles in our souls. This one night of the year.*

*Let us be shrived of self, and let us pray only white prayers -- white selfless prayers tonight, lifting clean hands up to one glorious star that is burning with holy light.*

*Unfailing it has shone through all the years, while we, God knows, have wandered strangely far; Now for this one brief night let us forget all but His steadfast star;*

*All but the supreme high sacrifice of God, the Giver, sending one to lift the burdens, from our hearts, and let us reach glad hands to take His gift.*

*--Grace Noll Crowell*

Dorothy Eaton  
(originally printed 1994)

## The Light that Darkness Cannot Overcome

*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. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1: 1-5)*

What more is there to say? These astonishing opening lines of the Gospel of John illustrate for us the beauty of Christ and the reason Christ came to us in the form of a helpless baby. I would be hard -pressed to find any line in scripture or anywhere else that is more powerful than: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The world around us seems to be changing in ways and at a rate that we never would have imagined even a few decades ago, never mind a century ago. And some of the change we agree is for the best. Some seems to be for the worst. Much of the change seems to be somewhere in the middle with both pros and cons.

And whether or not things are “getting worse,” whether we live in a more dangerous world or whether we’re just more aware of all the violence, pain and suffering in this broken world, one thing is certain: we need that light shining in the darkness. We need assurance that the darkness will not overcome the light. We need that beautiful, helpless baby. We need the Prince of Peace.

The former slave, abolitionist and human rights activist Sojourner Truth said, “Life is a hard battle anyway. If we laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight of freedom, it makes it all go easier. I will not allow my life’s light to be determined by the darkness around me.” May it be so for you and for me. Amen.



Rev. Meghan Davis

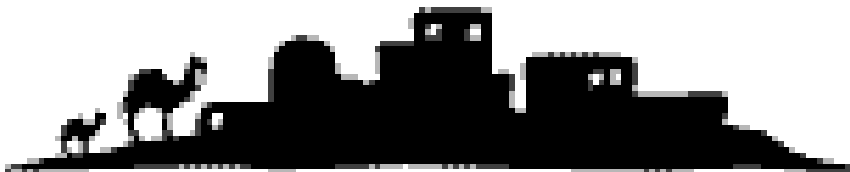
## The Nativity of Christ

*Behold the father is his daughter's son,  
The bird that built the nest is hatched therein,  
The old of years an hour hath not outrun,  
Eternal life to live doth now begin,  
The Word is dumb, the mirth of heaven doth weep,  
Might feeble is, and force doth faintly creep.*

*O dying souls, behold your living spring;  
O dazzled eyes, behold your sun of grace;  
Dull ears, attend what word this Word doth bring;  
Up, heavy hearts, with joy your joy embrace.  
From death, from dark, from deafness, from despairs  
This life, this light, this Word, this joy repairs.*

Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

(submitted by Larry Anderson)



December 2, 2019

## LOVE PIECES

Acts of love or kindness shown or done to another person.

Love pieces give joy to both the receiver and the giver. The idea that giving love pieces brings happiness to the giver isn't always clear. Letting other people help or do tasks for you not only benefits you, it also allows the giver to experience love and happiness with their giving.

After my surgery I couldn't drive. I had 30 radiation appointments I needed to be taken to. I didn't want to bother people, but it would be quite a burden for my husband to take me to every appointment. I mentioned the situation to some friends on Facebook and within days I had more people offering to take me than I needed.

I was able to reconnect with friends that I hadn't seen in years and got to know other friends better. What an amazing blessing for me to receive so many love pieces and for my friends in their giving.

Love pieces don't have to be big, expensive, or take a lot of time. They can be as simple as a smile to a stranger or a hug to let someone know they matter.

Please share as many Love Pieces as you can this Advent season.

Mary Roskilly

*Finding Light*  
*in the*

December 24, 2019

....And look! The star appeared to them again, standing over Bethlehem.

### *Matthew 2: 10*

The star always takes a prominent place in our image of the nativity, but astronomers have always had difficulty deciding what celestial event caused the light that led the wise men. Indeed, think about why the star is even part of the story... the angels got the word out to the locals -- couldn't they have done as much for the astrologers?

Again the images of light and dark that appear so often in the Bible center our thinking. The concept of the guiding star brings into focus the cosmic event of the birth of truth. The star was the guiding light that took the wise to the guiding light.

Our prayer yearns for this light today: O, igniter of stars, we look to the heavens for direction and meaning. Place stars for us today that we may continue our search for truth in this troubled world. We pray remembering the wise men's successful journey, following the light. Amen

John and Nancy Carl

(originally printed in 1993)

December 23, 2019 (continued)

I don't feel confident in saying not to fear, but I do feel that there is a path before us if we persevere and maintain focus on what is most important: our families, our institutions, our best behaviors and our faith.

*"...let us run with confidence the race that is put before us fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith....consider him who endured ....so that you will not grow weary and lose heart...." Hebrews 12.*

Joan Tyler

December 3, 2019

Supporting a loved one's end of life experiences is a time of deep darkness. Even when not physically close, the all-consuming weight of dealing with medical updates bringing word of new complications is emotionally exhausting. As our sister-in-law in Milwaukee dealt with her fourth round of cancer, this time a particularly aggressive type, the feelings of powerlessness were overwhelming at times. All we could do was pray that God would bring her relief from the pain. All we could do in Newton was end every plan for the future with the phrase, "Unless we need to be in Milwaukee."

On July 6, Melany Johnson, "Loni", lost her fight with cancer. The darkness entered a new phase, as family and friends transitioned from focusing on supporting Loni to supporting each other while searching for new life patterns that didn't include her vibrant presence. We arrived in Milwaukee on July 8 and spent a week with Dave's brother Tom and other family members.

And yet, Loni's spirit was very much alive and present. Loni's gentle instructions to her two-year-old granddaughter, "Be kind, be nice, be good" reminded us that Loni loved everyone and that we should do the same. Her infectious laugh and enthusiasm for new adventures shared with friends old and new rang out in the picture boards (lots of picture boards!) assembled by family members and friends. As folks from Florida to New York made plans to come to Milwaukee for her memorial service, points of light emerged in the loving memories and stories being shared.

As we planned the service, we knew that it needed to focus on Loni's deep faith and complete trust in her Lord and Savior. Loni lived her faith every day and told her family that her last wish was that everyone would come to know the joy she knew from walking with Jesus. Loni was sad to leave



December 3, 2019 (continued)

family and friends but had no fear of dying. She knew where she was going and that she would be spending eternity praising God in the company of the saints in light who preceded her. We decided that the closing hymn for the service needed to express the joy of that assurance.

The sanctuary was filled. Members of the congregation dressed in business casual mingled with biker friends wearing protective leathers. Committed Christian family members sat down with persons who, I suspect, hadn't been in a church since they had attended Tom and Loni's wedding in that same church not quite six years before. Scripture was read, thoughts were shared, pictures were viewed. And, as the service drew to a close, we stood and sang.

Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away  
To that home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away.  
Just a few more weary days and then I'll fly away  
To a land where joys shall never end. I'll fly away.  
I'll fly away, oh glory! I'll fly away in the morning.  
When I die, Hallelujah by and by, I'll fly away.

And the light shone! The brilliant sunlight in the courtyard as Tom sprinkled some of her ashes was blinding, but the impact on the hearts of those present was even stronger. Tom heard from numerous attendees that they had never been touched in the way that Loni's service had moved them. Her witness to her faith, shared with all of us in her life and carried on by us in her memory, is the light in the darkness that strengthens us as we move forward.

May it be so for all of you.

Linda Curtis-Stolper



December 23, 2019

## “Finding Light in the Darkness” -

Not an easy quest these days! But just a few minutes ago, I heard a radio program where an interviewee said that as our government has backed away from environmental leadership, many businesses have stepped in and pledged to continue their work toward climate-friendly practices and their continued adherence to the standards of the Paris Climate Treaty. And, the Washington Nationals baseball team has for the first time earned its way into the World Series! Beams of light, indeed!

Anything else? Well, the “press” is still largely free, “Mainline” churches are struggling, but holding on, and no large-scale wars are being fought.

Furthermore, I’m looking out a window into a wall-like panorama of autumn color. Some leaves are still a vivid green with others shading into the brightest of yellows, oranges and reds -- Nature’s beauty in a fantastic display!

Yet, it is a dark time and the route ahead is not clear (even though we hear many voices saying. “Let me be clear...”.)

Advent is the time to reaffirm our faith and regain our strength. The coming of Jesus Christ provided all of God's children with eternal redemption and hope. Knowing that the Son of God gave up everything to save us provides the motivation and strength to move forward and continue to serve. The eternal light of Christ shows us the way out of the world's darkness and guides us forward. We give thanks for our many blessings while we share those blessings with those who are less fortunate.

Remember, with the light of Christ, we find a way to serve to the best of our abilities. Individually, we can't solve the all the world's problems, but together we can all do something to help. We follow the light of Christ and do what we can to share that light with others. Once again, we anticipate the birth of Christ, and we rekindle our spirits.

*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.*

*Psalm 85:10-11*



In 1988 I was asked to join a pair of local men; Jim, a teacher/coach; and Steve, a clothier, who had been occasionally singing together since college, to form a gospel trio dedicated to singing Christian music. We began the hard work of putting together songs in three-part harmony and arranging music for piano, guitar and bass. We were soon travelling to local churches on week-ends, pulling our trailer emblazoned with "His Light, Sharing the Gospel Through Music". Our prayer before each concert was that we would be His light and that one person who heard our songs would be drawn closer to God.

When I think back on those years, I remember many moments when our prayer was answered, but none more vividly than a when a woman who was dying of cancer attended a Sunday evening concert. She was not a church-goer, but was coaxed into attending by the pastor's wife who assured her that it was a concert, not a church service. I noticed her sitting by the pastor's wife, emotionless, her bald head covered by a scarf. After a few songs, I saw that she was listening intently. In the middle of a "For What Earthly Reason", a song that talks about why Christ came to earth, I saw her lean against her friend and begin to quietly sob. The Light had come in a dramatic way. The woman came to us after the service to tell us with great excitement that she had never heard these words.

Moments like this kept us together for nearly twenty years, over two hundred songs, four hundred concerts in five states, seven albums and many family joys and tears. Our final sharing of the Light was as Steve and I and our spouses sang some of those same songs to Jim in his hospital room just before his passing.

As Children of the Light we are charged with sharing that light in our world, in whatever way we can. An encouraging word, a prayer, a smile, a meal, a verse - all ways of sharing that Light that comes from God who lives within us.

Norm Grimm  
Past President, Iowa Choral Director's Association, Inc.

December 5 2019

## This Little Light of Mine

This little light of mine....

Arise shine for thy light has come...

The Light of the world is Jesus...

We who were walking in darkness have seen a great Light...

Even though these lines are from different songs they all tell the story of light, God's Light. Every Advent season we celebrate the birth of our Lord who was sent to the earth as a baby. He lived on the earth teaching, healing and yes dying for our sins on a cross. A light shining in the darkness leading us to God's saving grace.

The thought of such a priceless gift makes me want to sing praises to His name. God has given me eternal life, and because of that I can hopefully be a Light Shining in the Darkness for Him and tell others of his love in word and song.

Soon we will be singing Christmas Carols and there is at least one song with "Light" in a verse. As you sing the carols this year see if you can find the "Light" while you celebrate.

Deanna Manley



December 22, 2019

Advent Meditation, Terry Rickers

In 1980, a musical group called "The Police" released a song called "Driven To Tears". It lamented first-world communities' tendencies to gawk and recoil at photos of tragedies around the world without taking action to ease the suffering. Here are some of the lyrics:

*How can you say that you're not responsible?*

*What does it have to do with me?*

*What is my reaction, what should it be,*

*Confronted by this latest atrocity?*

*Driven to tears...*

*Hide my face in my hands, shame wells in my throat;*

*My comfortable existence is reduced to a shallow  
meaningless party.*

*Seems that when some innocent die,*

*All we can offer them is a page in a some magazine,*

*Too many cameras and not enough food;*

*'Cause this is what we've seen.*

*Driven to tears...*

Part of the problem is that we frequently feel too overwhelmed to face the pain and tragedy our brothers and sisters around world face every day. Where do we start? How do we overcome feelings of despair and hopelessness? How do we escape this darkness?



December 21, 2019

John 1: 5: ***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*** (NRSV)

It is significant that this liturgical season evokes light in the darkest season of the year. Scriptures contain a profusion of references to light; one of my favorites is from the opening hymn of the Gospel of John.

Probably one reason I find this verse so compelling is that I have experienced light in the midst of darkness time and again throughout my life. Remembering those times has brought me comfort and strength when darkness overwhelms. One of those times was on a beautifully idle day in San Antonio. I had just exited an office where I had received devastating news. Still in shock, I stumbled out to the Riverwalk, a place where I always found beauty and repose. I sat down at a table near a coffee kiosk as tears quietly streamed down my cheeks. As I pondered how I could recover from this desperate situation, I realized I had company; the young woman who was staffing the kiosk was sitting across from me. She said nothing, but simply patted my hand, looking at me with caring eyes. Twenty-plus years hence I still see those lovely, compassionate, mahogany eyes.

She did not speak and I never saw her again. I hope she is living an enriching, full life deserving of one with such a heart. However her life has unfolded, she no doubt has no recollection of that afternoon when she brought light to a stranger in darkness, but that moment has often reminded me, that hurting-stranger, how darkness can be overcome when we bring the light of Christ to one another.

**Prayer:** *Thank you, God of grace for all those who bring light to darkness. Help us be your light in the hurting world. Amen.*



Peggy Krong  
(Meghan's Mom)

December 6, 2019



I love it when the Christmas tree is set in its stand. With the room lights off, I string as many strands of light as possible around and around the tree. Now, this is the important part – I sit in the darkened room with only the sparkling Christmas tree lights on and enjoy the beauty of the light in the darkness.

In 2 Corinthians 4:5-6, Paul, speaking to the Christians in Corinth, writes - - **For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," MADE HIS LIGHT SHINE**

**IN OUR HEARTS to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.**

Just as the sparkling lights light up the Christmas tree in the darkness, God's eternal light lights up our hearts and that beauty shines through us for others to see and come near to the God of Love.

I pray that each day of your Advent (celebration in anticipation of Christ's birth), you let God's light shine to those around you.

God's peace be with you.  
Marilyn McCallister

December 7, 2019

Our world is covered with problems: hunger, war, poverty, deceit... It is easy to become overwhelmed with the sadness and evil that is commonplace. Since man is made in God's image this is sometimes a scary thought.

However, Jesus sends light into this darkness in many forms. One form is our church family. We have felt embraced by the people in our church. Singing in the choir has been a special blessing for us. The close fellowship combined with the opportunity to praise God in song is a bright light in our life. Sure, there are some cold Wednesday nights when I am comfortably toasty in my recliner that I grump about leaving my home. Then I get to choir and am enveloped in the experience once again.

We have also been encouraged to participate in other church offerings. From progressive dinners to Sundays at 4 to other events, we have enjoyed and grown with our church family.

Sunday worship and fellowship is also a weekly light. We appreciate the music, setting, learning, and sharing.

So, please don't give in to the darkness. We are blessed to have our light here at First Presbyterian. God is with us.

Steve and Linda Gehling



December 20, 2019

## "Light of the World" (Lyrics)

Lauren Daigle

The world waits for a miracle  
The heart longs for a little bit of hope  
O come, O come, Emmanuel  
A child prays for peace on earth  
And she's calling out from a sea of hurt  
O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And can you hear the angels singing

(chorus)

Glory to the Light of the world  
Glory the Light of the world is here

The drought breaks with the tears of a mother  
A baby's cry is the sound of love  
Come down, come down Emmanuel  
He is the song for the suffering  
He is Messiah  
The Prince of Peace has come  
He has come, Emmanuel

(chorus)

For all who wait  
For all who hunger  
For all who've prayed  
For all who wander  
Behold your King  
Behold Messiah  
Emmanuel, Emmanuel

(chorus)

Behold your King  
Behold Messiah  
Emmanuel, Emmanuel  
The world waits for a miracle  
The heart longs for a little bit of hope  
O come, O come, Emmanuel

Prayer: "Our Father, take away the veil that dims our vision. Help us to see.

Val McKee

December 19, 2019 (continued)

Remember the anxiety when a flash of lightning snuffs out all the lights, even the street lights, and you can't see your hand in front of your face? And remember the immense relief when you finally find a match and a candle (or your cell phone!) and you have a small bit of light? And remember how bright and important that tiny bit of light was in all the darkness?

Days have been growing ever shorter these past weeks, as they did long ago when the shepherds found a strange and bright light in the dark winter sky. They didn't know yet what it meant, but as scripture says "They were sore afraid".

We now know what that bright light signified, and no longer need to fear darkness, because as surely as the Earth tilts on its axis to bring us longer days of sunlight, the light of Christ always shines.

**"I am the Light of the world," He said; "the man who follows me shall certainly not walk in the dark, but shall have the light of Life."**

Linda Campbell

December 8, 2019

## Light in the Darkness

In "Amazing Grace" we imagine the future bright shining as the sun. Not all amazing light has to be so intense. My durable image of light shone cold in the night.

When I was little, my father and I would always step out the back door before bedtime. One night I left little barefoot prints in the frost on the porch boards. I don't know if I noticed a chill, but I remember the moon, half risen in the clear calm sky. It lit our silent fields where nothing moved. We had electricity in our area by then, but there were no lights on at our place, and no lights at any of the neighbors' places. All was still, yet we clearly saw the white houses and barns at each farm down to the east, across the valley, and up the bluff across the creek. Everyone's work finished, families had all gone inside except for us.

Not every creature slept. We could see our cattle, dark shapes where they lay loafing in their lot, the coated ground gleaming white with frost. From the dark forms of the cows, each ruminating on the day as they chewed the cud, clouds of breath exhaled into the cold night told us they were going about their solemn duty of producing for our milking chores next morning. For the moment, there was no other work to do; not for them, not for us; only a scene to behold.

Maybe in earlier centuries, before cattle arrived, someone on that ground could have seen a herd of bison or deer, puffing there with their breath in the same crisp moonlight. Maybe some future people will see it in times after domestic cattle go.

But for always, it might have been that undoubting kind of confidence, that of children beside their parents in a peaceful world, that inspired Bible images that we recognize of a steadfast God. The world is not always quiet, peaceful, and clean. Sometimes yes, sometimes no, but in the future surely. For me the image serves to ground a faith that ultimately the light will shine pure and good, and all will be well.

Tom Mott

December 9, 2019

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

We recently returned from a cruise through the Panama Canal, spending eighteen days on a ship sailing through the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Ocean. One of the highlights for us of life on board the ship was the nightly setting of the sun, the rising of the moon, and the revealing of the stars. Although the darkness of the night sky in the middle of the ocean was contaminated by the lights of the ship, one's mind could easily imagine the experience of navigating the vast ocean by the light of the stars. Can you picture the early explorers, the settlers of the west, the Polynesians in their outrigger canoes navigating the great unknown by the stars and the planets? We have backpacked into the wilderness of the Wind River Mountains and have been astounded by the clear, bright nearness of the heavens. The three kings in the Christmas story found their way to the Christ child by following the stars. For much of history humans have lived with profound awareness of the heavens in a way that we modern, light-polluted people have difficulty imagining. They did not possess the knowledge of space that we have acquired in the modern age but they instinctively knew that the lights in the night sky had something to tell them. They looked to the heavens for direction and comfort in a dark world. May we do the same.

Creator of light,

We look to you for guidance and comfort, knowing that as we look to the heavens we are not alone. Amen.

Linda Erickson

December 19, 2019

## Finding light in the darkness...

A baby, just emerging from the darkness of its mother's womb, turns its head toward the light. A plant growing in the shade of a larger tree bends and turns its leaves to the light.

Very early people were certainly alarmed when they found the hours of light each day growing shorter, and had great celebrations when they noticed the days were gradually getting longer again. Monuments like Stonehenge were built to mark the very time when the darkness would cease growing longer and the light would return. There are celebrations in Taos recognizing the monuments the Anasazi built to commemorate the time when the light would return. At Teotihuacan, the Pyramid of the Sun was built to honor the slow death and return of the light of the sun.

At points in time, mankind literally worshipped light, the sun, and fire. From the first time man learned how to capture some of the fire set by lightening and carry it home to light their cave, to the worship of the sun god Ra, the most powerful of the ancient Egyptian pantheon of deities, we recognized how important light was. Light is life. Plants convert light into carbohydrate, energy to grow. Sun light produces a substance to help people build strong bones and to resist diseases.

We have long used light as a way of celebrating and commemorating. I offer for example candles on a birthday cake, the 8 lights and the "helper" of the Chanukah menorah, the lights on the Christmas tree, the Eternal Flame at Arlington cemetery, the Olympic torch, the Christ Candle in our chancel, and the reverence with which we carry it into and out of our place of worship.

December 18, 2019 (continued)

We experienced that recently when we first saw our wonderful daughter in law after her cancer surgery and she gave us her beautiful smile.

But above all, we must think of that star so long ago that guided the shepherds and wise men to the lowly stable where they honored the birth of a baby that would one day become the shining light for one third of the people in the world.

Gary Parsons



December 10, 2019

Last year Larry and I participated in hosting “The Peace Light of Bethlehem.” The Peace Light is a program inaugurated in Austria in 1986 as part of a charitable relief mission for children with disabilities and people in need. The Peace Light is a continuously burning flame, originating from the Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Each November, a young person from Austria travels to Bethlehem and lights two lanterns from the eternal flame. It is returned to Vienna where Scouts from many countries light their lanterns and disperse the light throughout Europe and Eastern Asia. At the same time, the head of security for Austrian Airlines carries the flame to Kennedy Airport in New York. From there, Scouts set off to disperse “the light” throughout North America.

Last year we transferred the flame from the Maytag Scout Center to a hurricane type lamp that we brought to transport it to our house. We had to be at the Center before 5 PM the Friday before Christmas, then manage to keep it going through the weekend till Christmas Eve on Monday.

I had prepared ahead of time at our house, having oil lamps and all kinds of candles on hand. We placed the flame in the bathtub with the door closed when we had to leave the house in order to keep the cat and the flame from meeting. It was a bit nerve wracking!

The most stressful times were keeping the flame going while we slept. The last evening of hosting the flame was the worst. I was worn out from taking on this mission of keeping the Peace Light “alive.” I know that no one would have known if it had gone out and I had to light it again. But, I was determined to keep this particular flame going. On Sunday Dec. 23, I went to bed weary with babysitting this special light. I woke up early the next morning and went to look. Yes, there was a flicker of flame there. It had not gone out.



This year, as the theme of the Advent booklet was announced, I remembered last year's experience and the stress of keeping a physical flame lit in our home for parts of 4 days. I wondered if I would feel like taking on that commitment again this year. Since it is just October 19 when I am writing this article, I have yet to decide to take this on again and get it to our church on Christmas Eve.

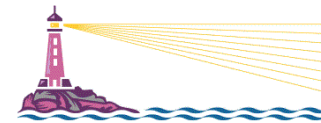
Having the physical flame of "The Peace Light" from the grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem reminds me to keep the Spiritual Light of Christ inside of me helping me to guide our paths. I am imagining keeping the Light of Christ alive inside of me and checking from time to time to see if the flame is still there. Sometimes we get weary of doing good and it seems like the flame becomes weak. We need to take some time to refresh ourselves and renew the oil in our lamps or trim the wick on our candles or take time to make sure our bodies can continue to be a light unto the darkness.

Linda Anderson



When Kay and I heard the theme of this years' Advent Booklet "Light Shining in the Darkness" we started thinking of examples of that and asked several friends to do the same. Here is a partial list of what we came up with:

- ♦ A ship's crew relieved to see the light from a lighthouse during a storm.
- ♦ The moon and stars in the wilderness.
- ♦ A campfire in the wilderness guiding fishermen back to camp and comforting those around it.
- ♦ A night light relieving the fears of a child in the dark.



Years ago we were riding, with the First Presbyterian youth group, the Sparta-Elroy bike trail in Wisconsin. It features three very old and long railroad tunnels. When traveling from one end, the other end is not visible for a long time and without a flashlight you are traveling in complete darkness. What a relief when a tiny pinpoint of light is seen at the other end.

Touring the Mark Twain Cave in Hannibal, MO at a certain point they turn off the lights to show the participants the total blackness that exists without artificial light and what a relief when the lights are turned back on. Especially with our pre-teen granddaughters but to a certain degree grandma and grandpa, too.

Certain people provide "light" just by virtue of their outlook and personality. Just think of the support the British people got from Winston Churchill during the dark days of WWII.

December 17, 2019 (continued)

*Still Christ comes to save God's people, still He  
comes to those oppressed.  
To the folks who toil and struggle, God has sent the  
very best.  
To the young and to the old, to the homeless, tired  
and cold,  
To the lost, to those who mourn, to the world, a child  
is born.  
In one little baby's birth, God knelt down to love the  
earth.*

*In this time of celebration, may we show what life  
can be,  
As we care for God's creation, as we serve the  
Prince of Peace,  
Seeking justice everywhere, lifting burdens others  
bear,  
May we gladly serve and pray- knowing why we live  
this way.  
In one little baby's birth, God knelt down to love the  
earth.*

Linda Kirchhoff



December 11, 2019

## “Finding Light in the Darkness”

Imperfection and perfection go so hand in hand, and our dark and our light are so intertwined, that by trying to push the darkness or negative aspects of our life to the side...we are preventing ourselves from the fullness of life.

JEFF BRIDGES

(Word for the day 9-29-19)

When I read this passage and knowing the theme of this year's Advent booklet, I just felt a strong connection between the two. It's only in the darkness of night that we can see the light of the stars. It's in the darkness of a tragedy that you eventually see the light of God, shining strong to draw us closer to the loving arms of God. In the darkness of night, the star shone brightly over the manger, leading all to the new born baby Jesus. We all have experienced our “darkness” at some point in our lives. I am no exception. Many times these events bring us closer to God. I lost my father to esophageal cancer 27 years ago. As the disease progressed, he lost more and more of his ability to swallow. A short time before his death, he indicated that he wanted to take communion one last time.

My mother called and told me what was going on and if I'd come to their place, which I did. Their home was across the street from the parsonage, and the minister was young, just out of seminary. This was the first parishioner he had that was dying, but though we all knew the likelihood of my father having difficulty taking communion because of the issue with his swallowing, the minister came over.

Through the words of the Eucharist, and several prayers, my father was able to chew and swallow the body of Christ and drink his precious blood given for us all. I was in the middle of such a darkness, watching my precious Dad starve to death a little more each day because of the cancer, I was able to see the light of God shine so brightly that day that I knew there would be loving arms waiting for Dad when he left this earth and crossed over to Heaven. Thanks be to God!

Mickey Van Baale

December 12, 2019

### LET THE LOWER LIGHTS BE BURNING

*Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
From His lighthouse evermore.  
But to us He gives the keeping  
Of the lights along the shore.*

*Let the lower lights be burning!  
Send a gleam across the wave!  
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman  
You may rescue, you may save.*

*- Philip Paul Bliss*

I've sung this 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn more than once as a member of the men's quartet here at First Presbyterian. Looking at the words, they call on us as Christians to be lesser lights of God. Another similar exhortation is in Matthew 5, where we are told "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven." However, I think the command in the hymn is different in that we should let our light shine not just so that others may glorify God, but also as a lesser beacon that can actually change others' lives.

While Jesus is the Light of the World, we are entrusted to reflect that light. As the lower lights along the shore, it may be OUR light (as I see it, our joy, our Christ-likeness) that those who are "at sea" spiritually see first.

In this season of Advent, when we again celebrate the birth of our Savior, we might do well to remember: our light is not eternal like God's, but during our lifetimes it can be the difference in others' lives – maybe a life-saving difference.

Dave Stolper

December 17, 2019

2019....At the present time, there seems to be a lot of darkness in our world- famine, starvation, sickness, racism, grief, and dissension, to name only a few. I certainly do not have the answers to these problems. The best I can do is pray, write letters, and donate to some causes. Some of you are activists, and I applaud your efforts to try to bring light on these serious issues.

During the Advent season we are to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. As I have pondered what to share with you this year, I kept being reminded of the light Christ brought into the world, and I have reflected on hymns that bring this subject into our somewhat dark lives.

I, who have definitely been more of a Christmas carol person than an Advent song enthusiast, was surprised at the number of hymns in the Advent section of our hymnal that refer to darkness and light. Look at the words of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence," "Creator of the Stars of Night," "Comfort, Comfort You My People," "People, Look East," "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night," and "Rejoice, Rejoice Believers."

I discovered a new, to me, Christmas Eve hymn, sung to the tune of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." The words were written by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette and is titled "All of You Who Walked in Darkness":

*All of you who have walked in darkness, who have  
known the fear of night-  
Now rejoice and sing with gladness; come and see  
the wondrous light!  
God has turned your tears to song, lifting burdens,  
righting wrongs.  
God sent us a tiny boy bringing hope and peace  
and joy  
In one little baby's birth, God knelt down to love the  
earth.*

December 16, 2019

### The Light That Shines in the Darkness – A Poem About Hope

There's a light that shines in the darkness.  
There's a destiny waiting at the end of the road.  
There's meaning in the middle of this emptiness.  
There's a reason you've been asked to carry this heavy load.  
Lessons are taught when we reach out  
Farther than we thought we'd ever dare.  
Faith abounds when we confront our deepest doubts,  
Enduring more than we dreamed we could ever bear.  
There's a dawn waiting at the edge of every midnight.  
There's a seed planted with every fallen leaf.  
With every wrong there's the chance to make a right.  
With every hour of suffering there's an eternity of relief.  
Our darkest moments give us the opportunity  
For seasons of our greatest growth.  
Every day we work towards continuity  
Of acceptance and persistent hope.  
And there's a light that shines in the darkness.  
There's a star that guides the way.  
There's a gate that's open to forgiveness.  
There's a shepherd who saves those who've gone astray.  
-Poem Written by Justin Farley

John 8:12, "Jesus once again addressed them: 'I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in.'"

Submitted by Jeanette Shannon



December 13, 2019

Light comes in many forms. But in all forms it provides comfort, safety, visions. The form of light that comes most to our minds is the sun and that would be the first light.

But consider lights on cars, buildings, rooms, etc. In each instance light provides an opening in the dark of night. Lights say safety and comfort. Lights can show us the way home.

Imagine the sight that the wise men had when they saw light in the midst of darkness!! That light also brought safety and comfort to them and the way "home". And imagine the sight that we might have in the darkness of night during an accident when a light appears to help us. Comfort!! Relief!! Joy!! Those wise men likely experienced those same feelings as they were awaiting news of the Birth.

Many of the lights that we enjoy today are made by humans. But the light for the wise men was made by God. We may not think of the origins of our lights and appreciate the work of many to create those lights. But the light of God shines every day in our lives...we only have but to look at it.

Barb Taylor



December 14, 2019

When Linda and I were married, we had this phrase inscribed on the inside of our wedding rings: “Walk in the Light.” Here is the context of the phrase in I John 1:6-7: “If we say that we have fellowship with God while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Forty-seven years ago I had little understanding of what this means. I was a young and enthusiastic believer with a naïve optimism about how great life would be. Thank God, life events began pretty quickly to puncture that balloon of optimism and to demand a more nuanced exercise of faith.

We have been greatly blessed and lucky in our lives, but there have been many periods of darkness too. Illness, family problems, worries about our children, job and financial concerns – these have generated fears and anxieties. And there have been crises of faith, when I have doubted God’s existence and my own integrity.

I am not sure I have a whole lot more understanding of the passage in 1 John now than I did back then. But I don’t think the “dark times” of our lives are what the writer was talking about. “Walking in darkness” is a choice – a choice to pursue a life course that denies or ignores God and the vision that God has for the world and for humanity. Jesus’ term for this vision is “the kingdom of God.” M. L. King Jr. called it the “beloved community.” To walk in the light is to pursue that vision.

None of us is immune to the kinds of darkness life brings us. And “walking in the light” won’t mean that we have ready answers for life’s dilemmas. We will experience fear, anxiety, and doubt. But if we are walking in the light, seeking to further the mission of God – that is, love, mercy, and justice in all corners of our lives – we will have fellowship with one another. And that kind of fellowship, with God and one another, is able to sustain us, even in the darkest times.

Larry Anderson



December 15, 2019

## Light Shining in the Darkness

Having taught pre-school Sunday school for several years, I have fond memories of teaching young children to sing “This Little Light of Mine”. They enjoyed “hiding it under a bushel, no” and “shine all over Newton, Iowa and the world”; not hiding the light but transporting and reflecting the light.

The story of the creation and the resurrection presents light and darkness as very important issues. God commanded the light to shine out of darkness when he created the world and then he sent his son to be the light of the world. We taught our students that God is light and his light shines in and through us. Being a Christian, believing in God, salvation and eternal life brings light to those walking and living in darkness.

According to Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology - “Jesus came as the light of the world, breaking through the darkness of sin by his work on the cross. It follows that believers are a light to the world as well. Jesus describes his disciples as light and light-bearers. It is the task of all believers to pass on the divine light they have received. All those who have entered into the light now bear responsibility as missionaries of Christ, shining out as lights in a dark world with the light of God himself.”

During this Advent season, Christmas (and every day, actually) let us shine our light in all situations and with all persons whom we encounter. Remember the song – this little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Jane Repp