



Come Light Our Hearts

TENTH WEST SIDE ADVENT READER

SHOWN ON COVER:

Messianic Predictions

Thomas Ingmire

2005; Handwritten with quills on calf-skin vellum, gold and platinum leaf,
and hand-ground pigment

Come Light Our Hearts

*How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”*

ISAIAH 52:7

Advent is designed as a time of preparation for the arrival of Christ. As we move through these conditioning days together, people from our community have contributed personal reflections to help guide us through the themes of the season. Each week will have two readings (a Sunday and a Wednesday reading) and each reading will have a reflection, a prayer, a practice and a visual image.

This reader is meant to help us embrace a posture of waiting. While we consider our experiences of hope, peace, joy and love, we're also intending to make room for our restlessness and to hold up to God the places we feel incomplete. In our need and in our longing, we anticipate One who is coming, and together we share a common prayer to Christ – come, light our hearts.

Hope

DECEMBER 3, 2023 _ SARAH GENUIS

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned....
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

ISAIAH 9:2,6

REFLECTION

This August, Emerson and I found out we were pregnant. As each day and week passed, my anticipation for this little one joining our family grew. Then on a dark Friday evening in October, I excitedly headed off for a routine ultrasound. I wasn't prepared when the ultrasound tech told me the baby was there and measuring right around what was expected (11 weeks), but that there was no longer any heartbeat. I remember feeling overwhelmed with sadness as I sat there alone. A change to our family plans.

That night as I arrived home to a house filled with noise and

light and gave each of my three kids a hug, I was still sad but filled with glimmers of hope and thankfulness for how God has and continues to work in our family and be a part of our family story.

Each of us can feel that we are living in darkness and alone in a broken world. I have been encouraged to know that is not where God's story ends. The birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise of light shining in darkness and the start of a new creation and God's work of restoration and redemption for his people.

PRAYER

God, you have brought light to darkness, first in the creative work of our world and then through the life of a tiny baby. Help me to live and see your light working in our world.

PRACTICE

Take time to reflect and be thankful for a time that God has brought a sense of hope in your life through another person's words or actions. Is there a way that you can encourage and bless someone in your life going through a dark time?

See ***Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt***
by Rembrandt van Rijn, p.20

Hope

DECEMBER 6, 2023 _ EDNA BISNAR

*Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God...*

*A voice of one calling:
“In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.*

*Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.*

*5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.*

ISAIAH 40:1,3-5

REFLECTION

Covid struck me while touring in Spain!

HOPE is awaiting good things to happen - a miracle. My HOPE was to survive the 17-hour flight back to Vancouver despite unrelenting nausea, vomiting, and migraines. By God's grace, we made it back and I was cared for at Mount Saint Joseph

Hospital for 12 days. I was in a wilderness of morphine, IV, and continuous nausea. My prayer was short and desperate, “Help, Jesus!”

At my weakest, a highway for our God was being prepared. I had empty space within me for God’s Presence. My mountain and hill of self-sufficiency were made low and replaced with dependence on God and others. I was in a valley that was raised up with many prayers, and the extraordinary kindness and skills of the hospital staff and medical team.

At recovery, I shared this with my prayer warriors:

“This is a rich season for me in many ways.
I have discomfort but not great pain.
I can pray, think, talk, walk, eat, in slow, very small measures.
I have FREEDOM with hardly any striving except to get well.
I am a recipient of God’s Presence, comfort, whispers, images!
What blessings and “surprise moments” are poured on me.”
God’s faithfulness was revealed, and His Glory seen.

PRAYER

“May the God of Hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in Him, so that we may overflow with HOPE by the power of the Holy Spirit.” – Romans 15:13

PRACTICE:

Listen to “Living Hope” by Phil Wickham and reflect on the lyrics.

See **We are Many and One** by Rosa Ines Vera, p.21

Peace

DECEMBER 10, 2023 _ RAFAEL QUINTANA

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse...
The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them...
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.*

ISAIAH 11:1A; 6; 9

REFLECTION

For the past decade, I've been locked in a nightly battle with insomnia. It's a struggle that begins almost every evening when I lay my head on the pillow, and my mind starts to race. Thoughts about things beyond my control start to flood in, transforming the tranquility of night into a storm of anxiety and restlessness. Sometimes, I feel like my brain becomes a hamster on a wheel, trapped in useless cycles of thoughts about things that can't be changed in the middle of the night. Over time, I have tried many different treatments that usually work for a while, but I kept returning to the previous pattern.

It may seem inappropriate to describe this wrestling while talking about “finding peace”, but it’s not. Through my journey as a Christian, I concluded that we live as the product of our faith. The stronger our faith, the better our life is in every aspect.

In Isaiah 11, the Messiah is described as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, symbolizing hope and renewal. The type of peace the prophet depicts in that passage does not come from the absence of struggle, which is the very nature of our world, but from the strength of our faith in Christ. Although there’s been a shift in my insomnia, with ups and downs, I know I am not alone, and it makes all the difference.

PRAYER

Lord, please have mercy on those who are anxious or in mental distress. Remind them of your promise of an eternal life in harmony and that you are the infinite source of peace. Allow them to draw near you to rest their minds. Amen.

PRACTICE

Say a prayer for peace tonight before you sleep – for yourself, for loved ones, and for a situation in our world.

Peace

DECEMBER 13, 2023 _ NICOLE THOMAS

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.*

*See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you...*

*I will make peace your governor
and well-being your ruler.
No longer will violence be heard in your land,
nor ruin or destruction within your borders,
but you will call your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise.*

*The sun will no more be your light by day,
nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you,
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.*

ISAIAH 60:1-3; 17-19

REFLECTION

Isaiah is speaking words at a time when the nation of Israel had known nothing but warfare and darkness. All of us whether it be nations stuck in warfare, or us as individuals experience darkness.

This makes me think of a time when we experienced death, the ultimate darkness. We have been witnesses to this darkness and despair with two of our babies who went home to be with Jesus. It was only His peace that covered us. His light shone upon us, and His voice was our ruler. Many times, we didn't know if it was day or night, but His Peace and presence was our everlasting light. I did not grasp the immensity of God's promises until we walked through it. Peace is not the absence of trouble but the presence of God. For the Lord will be our everlasting light and the God of glory.

PRAYER

God our Lord and Saviour, our Prince of Peace and Mighty King, may you increase your glory in our lives as a testament to your faithfulness – that the darkness of this world will not overcome our hearts. We praise you, especially in these times we are living in, that your Peace is with us.

PRACTICE

This Christmas season every time you look at a Christmas tree, be reminded of the peace we have, because of the birth of Christ.

Joy

DECEMBER 17, 2023 – DAVID SONG

*The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom...
say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come...”*

ISAIAH 35:1,2-4A

REFLECTION

I wouldn't say I'm a joyful person... but my 6-year-old elder son comes to mind when I think about the theme of joy. My wife Jenna and I recently hosted a gender reveal party, inviting her side of the family. As we were about to cut into the reveal cake, my 6-year-old began to be overcome with anticipation, excitement and joy. His shoulders were raised, his fists clenched and gently pressed against his cheeks... Then someone says, "What colour is it gonna be?" Without taking his eyes off the cake even for a second, my son excitedly exclaims, "It's... ummm... pink, PINK! OH, COM'ONNN!" (Pink, PINK, because Spidey and His Amazing Friends have two boys and one girl – and we already have two boys). His hands quickly cover his eyes for a moment only for them to then pull down on his face! As the knife cuts into the cake, my boy draws his face right up to the cake...

This seems like joy to me (as well as some level of anxious excitement?). Come to think of it, perhaps surprise and wonder have something to do with joy.

PRAYER

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
... where there is despair, [let me sow] hope
... and where there is sadness, joy
(from Prayer of St. Francis)

PRACTICE

P.S. By the way, it was blue!
Anyhow, next time you have to make a decision or when you're meeting a friend(s) at a coffee shop or restaurant, etc., invite someone else to surprise you with the decision. Or what's something that you've wondered about for a while now but have never gotten around to look into?

See *La Danse (The Dance)* by Henri Matisse, p.25

Joy

DECEMBER 20, 2023 _ NICK BANSBACK

*Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*

*Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.*

*Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert...*

*They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.*

*Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*

ISAIAH 35:5-6; 10

REFLECTION

My son Charlie is a scout and persuaded me to volunteer as a leader. Last January we both went on a scout winter camp to Manning Park. Temperatures reached minus 27 degrees, and we all slept in tents, though I was so cold I didn't really sleep. I spent a good chunk of the weekend digging out 5 feet of snow to pitch each tent and carrying gear back and forth from the parking lot to our camp site. Some of the kids require a high degree of special attention and others frankly just got on my nerves at times! I came home exhausted.

As I was telling my wife about the weekend she said “that sounds terrible”. At first I agreed, but on reflection I realized that this was not the case – it had actually been great. The kids absolutely loved the camp, and I felt a sense of achievement having survived it. I wasn’t leaping like a deer or singing like Isaiah describes, but I was reveling in a joy that surpasses the tribulations along the way. I try and remember this in my life, to try and not be so impacted by the good and the bad, but to be sure of the things that bring that deep underlying joy.

PRAYER

Lord, help me find and recognize what you have put in our lives that brings me joy. In times of hardship help me find my inner joy and use it to sustain me. Use me to help bring joy to others.

PRACTICE

Write down 3 things that provide you happiness, and 3 things that bring you joy. Reflect on what is different between happiness and joy. How might you focus more on developing those things that brings you joy?

See **Bauerngarten (Farmhouse Garden)** by Gustav Klimt, p.24

Love

DECEMBER 24, 2023 _ GRACE YOUNG

*"I will praise you, Lord...
Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust and not be afraid.
The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation."*

*In that day you will say:
"Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done,
and proclaim that his name is exalted.
Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things;
let this be known to all the world.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion,
for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."*

ISAIAH 12:1-2; 4-6

REFLECTION

Over the years as I grew in my faith within CREO (our youth program here at Tenth Church), I always loved worship. I first felt God's unconditional love during worship when I was in Grade 6 at CREO Camp. It was a feeling of God meeting me in my anticipation to know Him and being present in my life,

rather than being just a thought or an idea. As a leader at our most recent CREO Camp, I worshipped God as I looked back on the way He had changed my life and would continue to change the lives of all of our students. When the prophets of the Bible praised God for all the good things He had done, they also anticipated the salvation that He would bring to their people. They knew that God was, is, and would be their strength and defence as they anticipated the arrival of their Saviour. When Jesus came to dwell on Earth, this expectation was not only met, but surpassed! Jesus was not just a thought or an idea, He was a living hope and symbol of salvation walking amongst the people. Today, like the prophets, we sing with joy about the glorious things God did through Jesus and with anticipation, await the time when Jesus comes once again.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your love that embraces us as we trust in Your salvation. We pray that we will let you into our hearts to be our strength and defence. We pray that the whole world will know of the glorious things You have done. We praise You with joy for the eternal promise of Your Son. Amen.

PRACTICE

If you are finding it difficult to praise God because it is challenging to see and feel His love right now, listen to “Even When it Hurts” by Hillsong UNITED. This song helps us invite God into our pain and find the courage to affirm that He will bring miracles into our lives.

See ***We All Are One in Jesus*** by Soichi Watanabe, p.25

Christmas Day

DECEMBER 25, 2023 _ ANN CONWAY

*“Ask the Lord your God for a sign,
whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights...
the Lord himself will give you a sign:
The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,
and will call him Immanuel.*

ISAIAH 7:11;14

REFLECTION

A Sign? Jesus says not to look for signs (Matthew 16:4) but sometimes, unexpectedly, God gives us one.

Some years ago, when we were in London, Ontario, I was up at dawn on a cold November morning, to catch a bus to Waterloo to see a new counsellor, with some trepidation. I hoped for a coffee at the bus station. No luck! However, when we stopped at Stratford, a lady got on the bus with two cups of coffee on a tray. She approached me and said “I stopped at Tim Hortons to get myself a coffee but God told me to get TWO cups. This is for you.” I was moved because this to me was a sign that God knew where I was and where I was going. He was with me.

How much more the sign that the virgin would give birth to a

son and call him Immanuel, God with us in a tiny baby.

I was not born into a Christian family. I knew the Christmas story from school and from acting in a Nativity play at the local chapel. Of course I enjoyed the gifts and festivities with my cheery extended family in my grandparents cozy cottage but I was sad that that they did not believe in Jesus.

A few years ago, at an Advent evening at Tenth, we were given an Ignatian exercise to do on Jesus' birth. I was a bit dubious about this. However, as I sat alone, I suddenly found myself sitting in the stable with the holy family. Mary said to me "You can be part of our family." Then she said "Would you like to hold baby Jesus?" and she placed him in my arms. I could feel his small weight and the warmth of his head against my arm. God with me. Emmanuel. God with us all.

He came into a troubled world, "a sign to be spoken against" (Luke 2:34), but he is with us now.

PRAYER

Lord, in our very troubled world, we thank you for your coming as a vulnerable child to give us fresh hope and redemption. May we truly know your presence with us on this day. Bless all who are now suffering in the land in which you were born and may your light shine on them. In your name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

Share a small gift with a neighbour with the message: God is with you.

See **Adoration of The Baby** by Gerrit van Honthorst, p.26



Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt

Rembrandt van Rijn

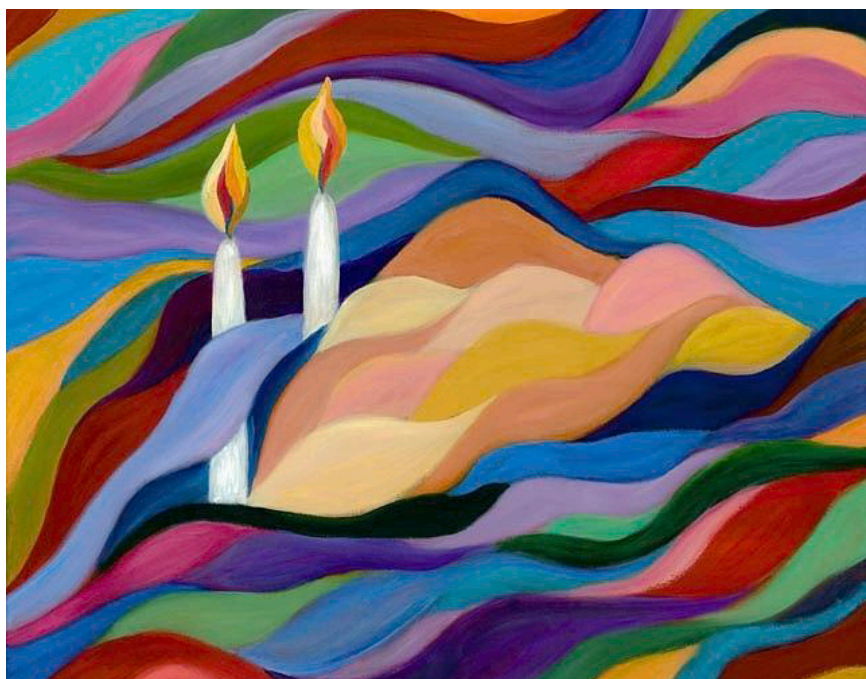
1647; Oil on wood panel



We are Many and One
Rosa Ines Vera
2020; Acrylic on paper



Holy Mountain III
Horace Pippin
1945; Oil on canvas



Sabbath Table

Jordana Klein

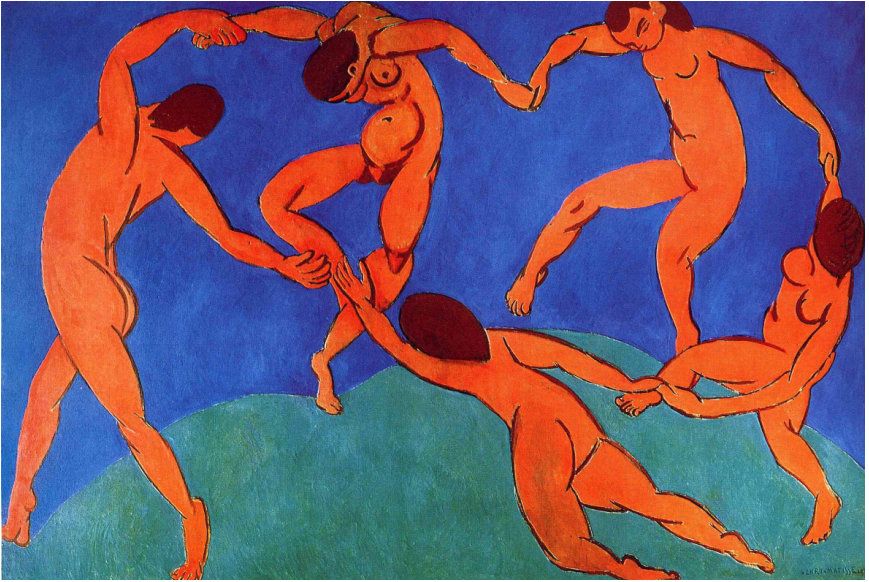
2019; Acrylic on paper



Bauerngarten (Farmhouse Garden)

Gustav Klimt

1905-07, oil on canvas



La Danse (The Dance)

Henri Matisse

1910, Oil on canvas



We Are All One in Jesus

Soichi Watanabe

2008, Oil on canvas



Adoration of the baby
Gerrit van Honthorst
1620; Oil on canvas

IMAGE REFERENCES:

Adoration of the Magi (Cover)

Monks of Conception Abbey
1896; Wall mural

Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt

Rembrandt van Rijn
1647; Oil on wood panel

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