

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



DECEMBER 17, 2023

LIGHT

in darkening times

by Drew Downs

The images captured by scripture, of light and dark, certainly ring true with the season. As days shorten and nights lengthen in the northern hemisphere, our composure matches the material of both seasons: environmental and liturgical.

But this change of season comes as an offering. For us and for the world. To share with us an opportunity. To notice the dark. And also to not fear it.

Some ancient cultures experienced the darkening of days as punishment. But they responded to rising darkness as the time for resilience, hope, prayer, and participation.

There is something to experiencing this change with our eyes open. To acknowledge the real impact. And choose to see our work continues to be important. To pray for the light. Because we know it. And its return helps us all.

ADVENT

2023

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

When Advent and Christmas Coexist

While most of us know the challenge of keeping Advent in a culture of Christmas, there is a semi-regular anomaly that happens in the liturgical calendar every seven years or so. When Advent and Christmas exist on the same day. Well...that's not technically true, but it does happen for us this year.

The four Sundays before Christmas mark the Sundays of the Advent Season. So that means when Christmas lands on a Monday, the Sunday before Christmas Day is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. And that *evening* is Christmas Eve.

We are so thoroughly adjusted to a *daily* calendar, running from midnight to midnight that we forget that our tradition originally marked the day as beginning *in the evening*. Which presents us with the occasional logistical challenge of celebrating Advent IV without Christmas being here just yet.

So join us on **Thursday, December 21** starting at 4 pm as we decorate the church and gather for a potluck dinner at 6 pm. Then celebrate with us:

- Sunday, December 24:
 - Advent IV— 10 am in chapel
 - Christmas Eve — 4 pm in church
 - Christmas Eve — 8 pm in church (with incense)
- Monday, December 25: Christmas Day — 10 am in church
- Tuesday, December 26: Feast of St. Stephen
 - Pot luck — 5 pm in Great Hall
 - Service — 6 pm in chapel

With love,
Drew

ADVENT

2023

FOR SUNDAY

Advent 3B

December 17, 2023

Collect

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 1:6-8,19-28

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

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

ADVENT

Reflection

John the Baptist: testifying to the light.

I think of this like a tagline on social media.

Most of us spend our lives trying to figure out where we fit, who we are. We think about what people will say about us when we're gone. Or what we're supposed to do with our life. And most of us don't have this kind of clarity.

Last week, we met John as one crying in the wilderness, a messenger, set to make the messiah's path straight. He was dressed like a prophet and sure acted like a prophet. In this different gospel, he says he is no prophet. Whether he is a prophet isn't dependent on *his* accepting the job title, however.

Just like I imagine John with social media accounts, I imagine his response in the modern demonstrative; offering a card, with a simple phrase: I baptize.

I suppose that John the Baptist isn't a complicated figure for us. He comes before Jesus. Prepares the way. Baptizes people. And uses his fifteen minutes of fame to guide people toward Jesus.

And yet I wonder if we recognize this job title he offers is always in demand. And it doesn't end with him.

Can we see that he is both unique, visionary, and necessary on the one hand and a role model for our own response to the divine? For we have seen the great light. And our world certainly could use more of it.

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