

ADVENT PRAYER SERVICE

Longing for Light in the Darkness

Invitation to Prayer:

[Lower the lights, or begin in darkness. Pause for some minutes and allow the silence to enfold those present. While still in darkness, play an instrumental piece of music appropriate to Advent.]

•CD: December (Artist: George Winston)

Introduction:

Leader: During the season of Advent, we are called to seek the light of Christ, even in the midst of darkness. We are invited to face the darkness in our own lives and in the world around us. The prophets assure us that the darkness will not overcome us. They call us to watch for the light. We are called to wait, to hope, to trust in promises made. As we make this Advent journey in faith, we invite God's light to dispel the darkness. We ask for the grace to set down all those burdens that darken our hearts as we search for the light. We ask for the gift of attentiveness that we may truly see God's loving presence within and among us. And we ask for renewed faith that we might be light for others.

Opening Prayer:

Leader: Let us pray:

All: God who dispels all darkness,

Come to be with us, in each one of our situations;

Come to live among us, live with us and in us;

Come to fill the distances that divide and separate us;

Come to reconcile us with You and with one another.

God of Light, open our hearts to the mystery of your love and the invitation of your grace. Let our complacency give way to conversion and our judgments to compassionate acceptance of others. Turn oppression to justice and transform conflict to peaceful accord. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who draws near, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

“What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

-John 1:4-5

Lighting of the Advent Wreath:

A designated person is selected to light the advent wreath using a taper.

Reader 1:

As we light the Advent Wreath we bring to mind all the people and the places in the world that are in need of light this day: (pause)

Reader 2:

We bring to mind those places in the world where families and countries are torn apart by conflict, violence, or war, and ask for the light of peace to break through the darkness. (pause)

Reader 1:

We bring to mind all those places in the world where people have been forced from their homes and are separated from their families and ask for the light of hope to break through. (pause)

Reader 2: We bring to mind all those places in the world where people are suffering from disease or illness, and ask for the light of healing to break through. (pause)

Reader 1:

We bring to mind all those places in the world where people are held captive by poverty, hunger, and isolation and ask for the light of freedom and abundant life to break through. (pause)

All: May our prayers encircle the world and offer light in places of darkness. May we work as one body to bring justice for the poor and peace for the afflicted. Enkindle hope in our darkened world and announce the dawn of your kingdom once again. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Reader:

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land.

In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: "The LORD our justice."

The Word of the Lord

Psalm II9: 105-112

Please alternate sides. All recite or sing the response.

R: Your Word, O God, is a light for my path

Side One: O, God, Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. I have sworn an oath and have resolved to keep your just commandments.

R. Side Two: I am utterly afflicted; O Lord, give me life according to your word. Accept my offerings of praise, Yahweh, and teach me your ways.

R. Side One: My life is in your hands always,
I do not forget your law. Though the wicked try to ensnare me,
I have not strayed from your precepts.

R. Side Two: Your instructions are my inheritance forever; they are the joy of my heart. I devote myself to honoring your statutes, forever.

Side One:

Glory be to God our Creator, to Jesus the Christ, and to the Holy Spirit who dwells in our midst,

Side Two: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.

Song: Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song) (Artist: Amy Grant, CD: Mosaic-2007)

Story for Reflection & Connection:

(From Walter J. Burghardt)

Reader: The day after Thanksgiving the New York Times told of a 33-year-old local cab driver whose shoulder-length hair was tied in a ponytail. About five years ago, this cabby "prayed to God for guidance on how to help the forgotten people of the streets who exist in life's shadows." As he recalls it, God replied: "Make eight pounds of spaghetti, throw it in a pot, give it out on 103rd Street and Broadway with no conditions, and people will come." He did, they came, and now he goes from door to door giving people food to eat. I am not asking you to stuff the Big Apple with spaghetti. But a New York cabby can bring light into your Advent night. He prayed to a God who was there; he listened; he gave the simple gift God asked of him; he gave "with no conditions"; and people responded. Here is your Advent: Make the Christ, who has come, a reality, a living light in your life and in some other life. Give of yourself . . . to one dark soul . . . with no conditions.

Questions for Reflection:

- How are you being called by God this Advent to be a living light for others?
- What is the Word that God is inviting you to act upon with 'no conditions'?

Closing Prayer:

Leader: Let us pray,

Emmanuel, Our world waits in darkness longing for Your light.

In the midst of darkness, enkindle our hope.

As we long for lasting peace in the midst of war, Be with us.

As we long for families to be reunited, Be with us.

As we long for enemies to be reconciled, Be with us.

As we long for cures and healings, Be with us.

As we long for decent jobs and economic security, Be with us.

As we long for love and community, Be with us.

Fulfill the deepest longings of your people and

Dispel the darkness in our hearts and in our world.

Let your Word ignite the hope the world needs to bring to life your love and justice. Amen.

Concluding Song:

- Song: Emmanuel (Artist: Amy Grant, CD: Amy Grant: The Collection)