

A Liturgy of Advent Lessons and Carols:
Darkness to Light¹

The Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross
Advent 4 | December 20, 2020

Prelude: *One Holy Light* Michael Shea
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Opening Song: *The Lord Is My Light* Taizé

The Lord is my light, my light and salvation:
in God I trust, in God I trust.

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in God I trust, in God I trust.

Words & Music: Communauté de Taizé
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The Blessing of the Light

Officiant: The Lord is my light and my salvation:

People: **Our God shall change the darkness to light.**

Officiant: Blessed are you, Lord God, creator of day and night:
to you be praise and glory for ever.

As darkness falls you renew your promise
to reveal among us the light of your presence.

By the light of Christ, your living Word,
dispel the darkness of our hearts

that we may walk as children of light

and sing your praise throughout the world.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

People: **Blessed be God for ever.**

Three candles on the Advent Wreath are lighted.

¹ The model for "Darkness to Light" is taken from the service developed at Salisbury Cathedral and St. James Cathedral in Chicago. Many thanks to Bruce Barber and the Very Rev. Joy Rogers for their help; to The Rev'd Canon Jeremy Davies, Precentor of Salisbury Cathedral (retired); and Tim Ruffer and the RSCM.

Opening Hymn:

Prepare the Way, O Zion

Hymnal #65

Prepare the way, O Zion, your Christ is drawing near!

Let every hill and valley a level way appear.

Greet One who comes in glory, foretold in sacred story.

Oh, blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.

He brings God's rule, O Zion; he comes from heaven above.

His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth, and love.

Lift high your praise resounding, for grace and joy abounding.

Oh, blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.

Fling wide your gates, O Zion; your Savior's rule embrace.

His tidings of salvation proclaim in every place.

All lands will bow before him, their voices will adore him.

Oh, blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.

Words: Frans Mikael Franzen (1772-1847); tr. composite; adapt. Charles P. Price (b. 1920)

Music: Bereden väg for Herran, melody from The Swenska Psalmboken, 1697

Words and music in the public domain.

Bidding Prayer

Officiant: Beloved in Christ:

In this season of Advent we come to worship the one who is our Judge, our Redeemer and our Guide. He is our loving God, who created our world and the far reaches of the galaxy; who said "Let there be light," and light shone forth, in order that all things might reflect the glory of his presence.

Let us pray:

Loving Father, the light of your glorious sunshine has too often been hidden by the clouds of our sin—your love we have turned to lust, your beauty to ugliness and what you had made possible we have rendered impossible. But in the disgrace we have made of your world your grace still shines. With all its fragile beauty your light remains a constant in our lives for your love never fails, brightening our days,

casting our shadows behind us and guiding us into the new life that you have prepared for us.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are God's light in the world, and you have come among us to illuminate our path and show us the true and living way into the Father's presence. Once again your flickering light has been placed in our hands to cradle and care for, as once your Virgin Mother cradled you. May the light of the world shining in our hearts be our care and delight as we share your radiance with others. In Christ's light may we be blessed and may we bless others even in the darkest corners of the world.

O Holy Spirit of God, kindle your fire of love in our hearts. That flame sees through us and reveals us as we are but may it also heal us so that renewed in love and joy and peace we may shine as Christ's light in the world, and serve his people in the Father's name, for you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are our God for ever and ever.

Together: **Amen.**

The Church of the Holy Cross would like to thank all the readers, the choir, and especially Ryan Bishop for editing the following video presentation.

Lesson I

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Genesis 1:1-5

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.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5, 14

Carol: *Creator of the stars of night* Hymnal #60, v. 1, 3, 5

Creator of the stars of night,
your people's everlasting light,
O Christ, Redeemer of us all,
we pray you hear us when we call.

When this old world drew on toward night,
you came; but not in splendor bright,
not as a monarch, but the child
of Mary, blameless mother mild.

Come in your holy might we pray,
redeem us for eternal day;
Defend us while we dwell below
from all assaults of our dread foe.

Words: Latin, 9th cent.; ver. Hymnal 1940, alt. Music: Conditio alme siderum, plainsong, Mode 4
Words and music in the public domain.

Lesson II

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

Isaiah 61:1-3

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:16-21

Special Music:

I Wonder as I Wander

Lucy Shaw, violin

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.
For poor on'ry people like you and like I...
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all.
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing,
He surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.

Words and melody in the public domain. Arr. Jay Richards. Used with permission.

Lesson III

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

A voice says, “Cry out!”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”

See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Isaiah 40:1-11

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Matthew 3:1-7, 11

Carol: *Comfort, comfort ye my people* Hymnal 67, v. 1-2

Comfort, comfort ye my people, speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning ‘neath their sorrow’s load.

Speak ye to Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
tell her that her sins I cover, and her warfare now is over.

Hark, the voice of one that crieth in the desert far and near,
calling us to new repentance since the kingdom now is here.

Oh, that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
let the valleys rise to meet him, and the hills bow down to greet him.

Words: Johann. G. Olearius (1611-1684); tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878), alt.

Music: Psalm 42, melody Claude Goudimel (1514-1572)

Words and music in the public domain.

Lesson IV

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:1–2, 6

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Matthew 4:12–17

Choir: *Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light*

Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light, and usher in the morning;
O shepherds, greet that glorious sight, our Lord a crib adorning.
This child, this little helpless boy, shall be our confidence and joy,
the power of Satan breaking, our peace eternal making.

Words and music in the public domain.

Lesson V

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:10–14

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

Matthew 1:20–23

Carol:

The Angel Gabriel

Hymnal 265, v. 1-2

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
“All hail,” said he, “thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favored lady,” Gloria!

“For know a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honor thee,
thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
most highly favored lady,” Gloria!

Words: Basque carol; para. Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

Music: Gabriel's Message, Basque carol; harm Edgar Pettman (1865-1943)

Words and music in the public domain.

Lesson VI

Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Isaiah 42:5-9

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Luke 2:25–32

Carol: *Let all mortal flesh keep silence* Hymnal 324, v. 1-2

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded, for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary, as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture, in the Body and the Blood
he will give to all the faithful his own self for heavenly food.

Words: Liturgy of St. James; para. Gerard Moultrie (1829-1885)

Music: Picardy, French carol, 17th cent.; melody from Chansons populaires des Provinces de France, 1860
Words and music in the public domain.

Lesson VII

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

Isaiah 35:1-6a

“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”

And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:12-13, 16-17, 20

Carol: *Lo, how a rose e’er blooming* Hymnal 81, v. 1-2

Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!

Of Jesse’s lineage coming as seers of old have sung.

It came, a blossom bright, amid the cold of winter,
when half spent was the night.

Isaiah ’twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind,
with Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind.

To show God’s love aright, she bore to us a Savior,
when half spent was the night.

Words: German, 15th cent.; tr. Theodore Baker (1851-1934)

Music: Es ist ein Ros, melody from Alte Catholische Geistliche Kirchengesäng, 1599

Words and music in the public domain.

*The Church of the Holy Cross again thanks all the readers, the choir,
and especially Ryan Bishop for their hard work in producing this special video presentation.*

Closing Prayers

Officiant: Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world. You scatter the shadows before our path, and through your Holy Spirit you lead us into all truth. May we who have been baptized in the ocean of your love, also shine as lights in the world, become instruments of your peace, and icons of your presence. For you are our God for ever and ever.

Together: **Amen.**

Officiant: Loving Father, you have created us mortals—bearers of death—and yet you destine us for immortality. We give you thanks that we can face the end of our lives with hope and even joy. For our Lord Jesus has entered the valley of death before us, so that where he has gone, secure in the Father’s constant love, we may follow after. If we go to heaven he is there; if we go to hell he is there also. Even there will his hand lead us and his right hand will hold us, for he, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is our God in time and in eternity.

Together: **Amen.**

Officiant: Judge Eternal throned in splendor, we come before you penitent for our wayward lives and contrite that we have marred your image in us. Yet we come before you without fear because your perfect love casts out fear and welcomes us home. Your love reveals us as we are with all our faults and failings exposed to your unwavering gaze. And yet, like St. Peter in the courtyard on the night of your trial, we are both seen and healed in that moment of being judged. May we like all your wayward prodigals be enfolded in your love, hidden in your wounds and restored to your fold, for you, our Lord and Savior, Friend and Brother, are our God this day and always.

Together: **Amen.**

Announcements

Advent Blessing

Officiant: May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Christ came amongst us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin.

Together: **Amen.**

Officiant: May he whose second coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love.

Together: **Amen.**

Officiant: May you, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life.

Together: **Amen.**

Officiant: And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain with us for ever.

Together: **Amen.**

— BCP Pg. 102 —

Officiant: Let us bless the Lord.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Closing Hymn *Lo, he comes with clouds descending* Hymnal #57

Lo! he comes, with clouds descending,
 once for our salvation slain;
thousand thousand saints attending
 swell the triumph of his train:
 Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ the Lord returns to reign.

Those dear tokens of his passion
 still his dazzling body bears,
 cause of endless exultation
 to his ransomed worshippers;
with what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture,
 gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, amen! let all adore thee,
 high on thine eternal throne;
Savior, take the power and glory;
claim the kingdom for thine own:
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.

Words: Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Music: Helmsley, Augustine Arne (1710-1778)

Words and music in the public domain.

Officiant: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: **And also with you.**

The Officiant may then conclude with the following:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

2 Corinthians 13:14

Postlude: *Come Now, O Prince of Peace* Edwin T. Childs

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Introduction to the Service Advent—A Reflection

Advent is, with Easter and Christmas, the season that most speaks to our contemporary human condition. It is a season that has long been symbolized by the lighting of the candles of an Advent wreath representing the four weeks of the Advent season and culminating in the lighting of the fifth principal candle at Christmas. No doubt this tradition reaches back into our Jewish past and the Feast of Lights at Hanukkah, and has been popular within Christian celebrations particularly in Germany and Scandinavian countries down the centuries. Today the Advent wreath has become a universal symbol, to be found in many households as well as in churches.

The lighting of a candle reminds us that though we live in a dark world at the heart of the Christian Gospel is a message of hope. Flickering and fragile though the light of a candle may be yet the flame of such a candle lights up a dark room. It represents that Light of the World which illuminates our world and our lives with its transforming radiance which guides us into all truth. It is in the belief that God is with us even in the darkness—as the story of Jesus will reveal as we travel the journey of his life from Advent to Pentecost—that many churches begin this Advent Season by lighting a single large candle in a dark church at the start of an Advent Procession. The candle recalls the hope incarnated in Jesus that shines in our dark world, as I have just described. And the procession reminds us that Christians are a pilgrim people, ever on the move for, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says: We have here no abiding city but we seek one to come.

Of course Christmas awaits us at the end of this four week season, and we will then be back in our comfort zone: back with the baby and hovering angels, the ox and the ass, the shepherds and their sheep, and the incense and the gold (let's forget myrrh for a moment with its darker implications!) Christmas, profound festival though it is, as we celebrate the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, often triggers our sentimentality and a superficial optimism. We forget that, much as we enjoy Christmas, often to excess, many in our world live without the basic necessities we take for granted, and for whom life is often 'nasty, brutish and short'. It was among them that Jesus was born, and for them he died. Just as we cannot celebrate Easter without plumbing the depths, as Jesus did, of Good Friday, so we cannot celebrate Christmas without the sobering preparation of Advent.

Advent is rich in music and verse, including some of the finest poetry in scripture, dominated by the prophecies of Isaiah and the heroic stories of John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. For many of us Advent's rich texture is exemplified in the Advent hymns with their declamatory message and their thunderous melodies. But for all its plangent beauty Advent begins in darkness and silence, reminding us of the real world beyond the shrine, where God himself was content—indeed determined—to pitch his tent.

As well as preparing for Christmas Advent has traditionally focused on more sombre themes as well, reminding us not only of the first coming of Jesus, but also of his second coming when as the Creed rehearses ‘he will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead’. This is a theme picked up in Thomas Cranmer’s peerless Advent Collect where he talks of Jesus who ‘comes at the last day in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead’. Some of our Advent hymns like ‘Lo he comes with clouds descending’ focus on the Four Last Things—death, judgment heaven and hell—adding a penitential note to our Alleluias. Though not much preached about these days those traditional Advent themes do concentrate on the ultimate things that confront us as human beings, and we need such opportunities as the Advent season provides to reflect on them. These themes reveal us—and indeed the whole of humanity—as we truly are. Not a pleasant sight, but extraordinary though it may seem, it is in us,—frail, wayward, prodigal humanity that we are—that God sees himself reflected and longs to get his own back—that is to bring us back home. That is why God, in Jesus, gave himself (emptied himself and was obedient even unto death is how St Paul puts it) so that all who believe should not perish but have eternal life.

Our world is dark—despite our human ingenuity and inventiveness—and our lives are dark as well, but year by year we light a candle in a dark room, as a sacramental affirmation that God has already lit a candle in our dark world. That light of the world has a name—his name is Jesus. ‘That light was the true light that enlightens everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome it’. We will hear those words from St John’s Gospel again on Christmas Day.

That is the Christian good news, that though our world is dark, a light shines. Its meaning is this: God loves us and he will never leave us. That conviction gives hope to our world and to each one of us. That is the message of Advent.

Thank God!

— The Rev’d Canon Jeremy Davies,
Precentor of Salisbury Cathedral (retired)

As a community of faith, the Church of the Holy Cross respectfully acknowledges that we gather to worship on the traditional lands of the Coast Salish peoples, past and present. Along with the land itself, we honor with gratitude the Stillaguamish and Duwamish tribes, on whose lands our buildings now stand.

The Church of the Holy Cross

The Rev. Jim Eichner

The Rev. Jonathan Hanneman

The Rev. Carlos Caguiat

The Rev. Julianna Caguiat

Beth Bishop

Rector

Curate

Clergy Associate

Clergy Associate

Minister Through Music

11526 - 162nd Avenue NE, Redmond, WA 98052
Phone: 425.885.5822 | www.HolyCrossRedmond.org