

Out of the Darkness



Advent 2025


CENTURY OF SERVICE
THE
MADELEINE
PARISH & SCHOOL

Out of the Darkness

Music: One Love Released, (based on O Waly Waly)

Text: Marilyn Robb

VERSE 1

*Out of the darkness may we find love,
And share with others this gift from above.
When lives are broken and need repair,
May we be present, with loving care.*

VERSE 2

*Out of the darkness, let hope be found.
With fears to conquer, let hope abound.
And when in sadness, our day begins,
Fill us with hope, Lord, forgive our sins.*

VERSE 3

*Out of the darkness, we seek your face.
We wait with patience to know your grace
When we grow weary, help us Lord, to see,
You are our Savior, born to set us free.*

VERSE 4

*Out of the darkness, one holy night,
You sent the Savior, born to be our light.
Walk with us daily, our faith increase,
That we your children, may live in peace.*

Dear Madeleine family and friends,

Before you open the pages of this Advent Booklet, take time to look at the beautiful cover page, created by Hugh Hammons. In this illustration, we see the dark clouds which represent the darkness that many of us are experiencing in our lives. Shining out of the darkness, the “Light of Christ” shines brightly, recalling the verse from John 1:5, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” On the lower part of the cover you will see two people holding hands, reminding us that we are not on this journey alone. We walk patiently, with each other sharing our faith and love and hope.

Thank you to the wonderful parishioners, staff, and friends of the Madeleine who have shared their faith and love in these reflections. May their thoughts and words enhance your Advent journey.

The Sunday meditations are based on the scripture readings for the day and are meant to be shared. The daily reflections can be shared or thought about privately.

A special thank you to Hugh and to the production staff who edit and print the booklets. All of this would not be possible without the support and blessing of our parish priest, Fr. Bonaventure.

May the words in this booklet, inspire you to be the Light in someone’s darkness this Advent.

—Marilyn Robb

First Sunday of Advent

Out Of The Darkness, Love

INTRODUCTION

I left the comforting darkness of my mother's womb to enter the darkness of a world at war. I was born seven months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The windows of our two-bedroom bungalow were covered with dark green shades, which we closed each night at sun-down, so the light from inside could not be seen by the enemy if they flew over our house with plans to attack. During the day, huge air force bombers practiced in the sky above my house, causing dark shadows that obliterated the sun. It was a time of darkness and fear, yet I was wrapped in the light of my family's love and faith in God.

In Sunday's first reading, Isaiah urges the people to "walk in the light of the Lord." Even though my life began during a dark time in our country's history, the people who cared for me were able to see and walk in the "light of the Lord." My parents made sure I was baptized and faithfully carried me to worship each Sunday. At night, when the green shades were pulled, they knelt by my crib and prayed.

Share: *How has love sustained you during the dark times in your life?*

† **READ: Matt. 24:37-44**

Share: *Do you think there were storm clouds to warn the people as Noah was building the ark? Explain what is meant by "Jesus returning as a thief in the darkness of the night."*

COMMENTARY

In Sunday's gospel, Matthew mentions the people who lived during the time of Noah. These people seemed to be oblivious to the dark storm clouds that were gathering as Noah and his sons worked on the ark. They were obviously so focused on themselves and their lives that they didn't see the approaching darkness. Matthew warns us, who are waiting for Christ's return, that it may be in the darkness of night when we least expect it. Are we being urged to focus less on the things of this world and more on our relationship with our Creator and all people and things created?

Share: *If you knew when Christ would return, what changes would you make in your life today?*

REFLECTION

For many of us, we seem to be living in a time of darkness and uncertainty. We are aware of gathering storm clouds, unlike the people during the time of Noah. What would Matthew say to us today? How should we live as we prepare for Christ's return? We can live as my parents lived during the dark days of the Second World War. We can share our faith and love with the people around us. We can give our support to those who are weak and stumbling. Sometimes, all that is needed, is time for a conversation...an attentive ear. We can be hope for the hopeless. The love that Jesus brought to this earth is now ours to share until he returns.

Share: *How can we keep God's love alive today?*

Prayer: Lord, help us to be your light and love in the darkness of this world. Amen.

Monday, December 1

Grateful

† **Psalm 100:5**—*The Lord is good and his love endures forever, his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

December days can be dark. Dark when you rise in the morning and dark before dinner. If we are tuned into the news we can often be confronted with more darkness. Is there a way to combat this darkness which affects your mood, your energy, your spirit? I believe one way out of the darkness is to focus on gratitude.

When our extended family gathers to share a meal, we always begin by sharing our “gratefuls.” This reminds us that we always have reason to show our gratitude for the many blessings God gives us each day. Sometimes the gifts are simple - a home run hit, an ice cream treat, a visit with a friend. Now think of the greatest gift which is presented in this psalm - God’s love that spans generations, a LOVE that endures forever! We are invited to respond with gratitude for God’s goodness and faithfulness as we reflect these gifts back to those around us.

—SANDRA TURNER

*Lord, help me to generously share your
unending love with others. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 2

Even in Times of Greatest Darkness

† **Proverbs 3:3**—*Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Bind them around your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart.*

Reflecting on the theme for this Advent, “Out of the darkness” and on the proverb above, I can’t help but think about my parents. Over the course of their lives they suffered great loss - my twin brother and my younger brother both died in infancy and childhood. My mother died in 2001 and my father in 2021. The day we buried my father was a beautiful November day. I remember standing in front of my brothers’ graves at the Santa Clara Mission Cemetery looking across the lawn toward my parents’ plot when suddenly gratitude for my parents’ lives washed over me. They taught me that we are not what happens to us. They gave my sisters, my remaining brother and me a magical childhood. Grief never stopped them from embracing the joy in life. To my eyes, their faith never seemed to falter.

The gratitude that rises up in me out of the darkness of my grief is God’s grace, reminding me that I carry their love in me.

During this Advent season, help us to remember that God is with us even in the times of greatest darkness.

—MARY LEVY

*May I always find you Lord, especially during
the dark times of my life. Amen.*

Wednesday, December 3

Awaiting God's Reply, Alert to God's Call

† **Psalm 116:1,2**—*I love the Lord, for he heard my voice... I will call on him as long as I live.*

When facing challenges of any sort, we appeal to God, either through formal prayer or simply by pleading for his help. Knowing our God is gentle and merciful, we are confident of his loving care. In anticipating his response, we must be open, for it may come in a variety of ways. Perhaps a glimpse of our own inner holiness will be revealed to give us strength. Maybe we will be led to witness an event that provides us with new perspective. Quite often, though, God's aid comes as an expression of love from someone around us. During Advent, we prepare to celebrate God's ultimate gift to us. In thanks for the many times that God has answered us, we must be alert to his call to act as his emissary in responding to the prayers of others. We must be ready to offer attention, comfort, understanding, or perhaps forgiveness to others—whatever our Lord guides us to do for their benefit.

—KEN BROWN

Guide my response Lord, when I hear you call. Amen.

Thursday, December 4

Family and Friends

† **John 15:9**—*As the Father loves me, so I also love you.
Remain in my love.*

As I think about all of the people who are part of my life, I am filled with the love and kindness my friends and family bring to me. I have lived a long time, and at my age, life has slowed down a great deal. Family and friends fill my quiet times as I think back on all of the memories we share and all of the things we have done together. I rely on my family and friends to continue to walk with me and bring light and love into my life. Through them I feel God's love.

—DELORIS KIMBALL

Thank you, God, for the people in my life, who show me your love. Amen.

Friday, December 5

Jesus-Heal Us of our Blindness

† **Proverbs 10:12**—*Hatred stirs up disputes, but love covers all offenses.*

Many Proverbs remind me of a door hinge, a device that provides two possibilities: either to open or to close. In this Proverb the two possibilities offered are hate or love. What is hatred other than blindness to the presence of Christ in our neighbor? And it is so easy to justify this blindness! When we choose to judge instead of acknowledging the sacred nature of our neighbor as a child of God we close the door to the possibility of love.

In today's Gospel (Mt 9:27-31) Jesus heals two blind men after they affirm their faith in Christ's power to heal. As we await the coming of Jesus in this Advent are we prepared to say "Yes Lord" to his healing power?

—JOSEPH WUJEK

*Jesus, cure us of our blindness so that we may see you in all others,
especially those whom we are quick to judge. Amen.*

Saturday, December 6

Be Open To Love

† **Psalm 147:11**—*The Lord delights in those who honor him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love.*

Frequently I find myself rushing between activities and commitments. My brain is already moving on to the next thing while I am physically rooted in the present. Sometimes it is overwhelming.

When I make time to breathe, look around, and be present, I marvel at the beauty around me in God's creation – in the sunbreak on a gray day, the birds flitting through the shrubs, the colors of the flowers and trees, and the kindness and compassion of our community members. The unfailing love of God is visible in all these things. God is always waiting for us to turn to him and share in his generous love. We can trust in him to guide us through rough waters, and we will see the rainbow after the flood.

—ROSE HORTON

*I place my trust in you, O Lord, my God.
Open my eyes to your gift of beauty. Amen.*

Second Sunday of Advent

Out of the Darkness, Hope

INTRODUCTION

It was a beautiful morning in late June, with the promise of afternoon temperatures in the 80s. I was unaware of what was happening outside. My attention was turned inward to the darkness I was carrying inside. The media kept me informed of the unrest in my country and the world. I was concerned about the future. There was news of another “mass shooting” and it was the beginning of the wild-fire season. I worried about a dear friend who was having serious health issues. My “to do” list for the day was long and contained projects I had been putting off for several days. I felt sluggish and unenthusiastic. Then I received a text from a dear friend asking if I was sitting out on my patio enjoying the presence of God on this beautiful morning? Just a simple question that turned my day around and brought hope and light into the darkness of my life.

In Sunday’s second reading, Paul reminds the Romans to continue to encourage one another to live with hope. When days are dark and the times uncertain, we need to bring hope to those around us... those who walk beside us and share our journey.

Share: *Name some simple ways you can bring hope to others.*

† **READ: Matt. 3:1-12**

Share: *What did John expect from the people once they repented and were baptized?*

COMMENTARY

In the beginning it was curiosity that lured the people out into the desert to see John the Baptist. Once they were there, he had them “hooked.” Much like the traveling “Medicine Man” in our country’s past. Yes, John lived a different lifestyle from the people of his time, but his message of “repentance and baptism” spoke to the people and convinced them to change. When they returned to their homes, they shared their experiences and spread the good news of the coming Messiah. It was a message of hope for the future.

Share: *What “happening” in your life that was so good you had to share it with others.*

REFLECTION

It is what you do today, now, that gives hope to someone else. One of my favorite quotes is from Dass Ram: “We are all here to walk each other home.” The people who went out into the desert to meet John were excited about and pleased with the change that occurred in their lives. They no longer carried the burden of their sins. They had been given a new beginning when they were baptized. They returned home filled with hope for the future. That hope is ours as God’s beloved children. As we travel through these days of Advent, let us make a special effort, to share that hope with each other. It could be just a simple text!

Share: *What other ways can we bring hope into the lives of others?*

Prayer: You are our hope and joy, O Lord, help us to share this hope with others. Amen.

Cloudy, with a Chance of Grace

† **Psalm 147:11**—*The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.*

I recently heard a case for Mary’s Immaculate Conception that she was conceived without sin because this allowed her to be completely free in her “yes” at the Annunciation. Without Original Sin, Mary could see clearly the consequences of her yes, and she could see clearly the great love of God offered to her. Her choice was the freest possible. Not goodness or strength on Mary’s part, but God’s mercy, his compassion, grants Mary this great gift. She places her whole hope and trust in it. God offers us the same gift in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

At times, I find myself “cloudy,” unable to ‘see’ clearly or make decisions well. A mentor once recommended going to confession whenever things were unclear or murky. Without fail, on hearing the words of absolution, the murkiness dissolves, leaving a simplicity something like what I imagine Mary’s to be. In Confession, we experience something of Mary’s total freedom, we experience something of the Immaculate Conception. When we, like Mary, put our hope in God’s mercy—his tender love and care for us—we are free to choose only good things. I pray for the grace to put my hope in his mercy this Advent.

—LAUREN CRAIG

*Thank you, Lord, for your constant love and care.
I place my hope in you. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 9

Dig Deep Time

† **Isaiah 40:31**—*They who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.*

This is dig-deep time. Early stage cancer has been the least expected bump to hit upon turning 40. Two different cancers in two years with two surgeries and treatment—what a whirlwind. I'd be lying if I said it has been a breeze, that I've felt God's comfort each day, that I know everything will be OK. But what is true is that my strength to take each day as it comes is not from me...and that my positivity about it all can only be from God. These blessings to keep going are encouraging me to dig deeper. Deeper than just going to Mass on Sunday, deeper than my nightly prayer as I drift off to sleep. Because all Jesus wants right now is me, and you, wherever we are.

—EMILY SHAMRELL

God, I offer myself to you this Advent. Amen.

Wednesday, December 10

Hope in God, our Light, O My Soul

† **Psalm 42:12**—*Why are you downcast O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God.*

It's pitch black at first glance. But take a minute and look up. On a clear night some 5,000 tiny lights within sight sparkle in the black sky. Fear, abuse of people, the ravishes of war, hunger and disease. At first glance, our world is pitch black too. But stop. Our faith reminds us otherwise. We even have reason to give thanks! Take a minute and be aware of the Christ-light within you, and breathe deeply. How precious that presence is to dispel the darkness around us. We take that light wherever we go. And awaken to the Christ light in each and every person. These Advent days we take hope and give thanks for the light of our Lord Jesus in all of us. Sadly so many of our brothers and sisters are afraid and discouraged and lonely. But the darkness of our world can never extinguish the light in them. So let's reassure one another, and give thanks and praise...for the light of Christ ever shines in us and in all those around us. I am the light, you are the light, and together our lights shine in the darkness. Christ is our light and together we shine!

—FATHER JOHN McGRANN

Lord, may I always be a light to others. Amen.

Thursday, December 11

God Delivers BIG!

† **Romans 12:12**—*Rejoice in hope, endure (be patient) in affliction, be faithful in prayer.*

This verse, written by the Apostle Paul, encourages believers to remain steadfast and faithful during difficult times. It refers in confidence for the future, rooted in God's promises, even in suffering. As I reflect upon Romans 12:12, I recall my third pregnancy. It became necessary for me to be on complete bedrest at 25 weeks pregnancy due to preterm labor. My mother-in-law came to stay with our family to help care for our 4 year old daughter and 3 year old son. My husband had a calendar beside my bed stating, "Each day on bedrest equals two weeks less time for baby in NICU." My mother-in-law brought me the Eucharist daily and we prayed fervently for the safe delivery of a full term baby. The trial of lying in bed for 3½ months was difficult to endure but as each day passed I became at peace that whatever happened, God was with me and I had confidence in the future. Indeed, God delivered more than I ever could imagine in a 9-pound very healthy baby boy at 38 weeks!

—DONNA WUJEK

*When I encounter difficult times, Lord,
help me to walk with patience. Amen.*

Friday, December 12

Out of Darkness, Hope Rises

† **Romans 15:4**—*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we may have hope.*

Today, we celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe. On this feast, we remember how God sent a mother into winter's shadows. In 1531, Mary appeared not to the powerful but to Juan Diego, poor and worried, and spoke a simple, radiant promise: "Am I not here, I who am your mother?" In a time of fear and fracture, she carried the Gospel's tender courage, drawing close, lifting the lowly, and pointing to her son. The tilma's stars still preach: heaven bends toward earth, light meets us where we are.

Advent invites endurance, not grim grit, but faithful waiting anchored in Scripture. Let the stories of God's rescue become your memory and your map. Open the Scriptures this week and ask, "Where has God been faithful before?" Name one place you are tempted to despair, and lay it beneath Mary's maternal care and Christ's coming light. Then take a small, concrete step of hope, call someone, confess a sin, share a meal, return to prayer.

Out of the darkness, hope rises, not because we control tomorrow, but because Emmanuel comes today.

—FR. ANTHONY AHAMEFULE

Help me find where to look for hope when the world feels dim and my strength is thin. Amen.

Saturday, December 13

Warmth and Brightness

† **Romans 15:13a**—*May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the Holy Spirit.*

As the winter solstice approaches the days grow shorter and the cold dark nights seem to stretch on interminably. But while the days grow darker, I find solace in the hopefulness that the Advent season represents for me. Sitting with family by the glowing fire in the fireplace contemplating the birth of our lord shines light on even the darkest day. Even though I find myself stressed with the long list of things we need to take care of as part of the holidays, and school closures, I realize that I need to step back and not focus on the negative places that my mind could go during this time. I find warmth and brightness in the fire, the presence of my family, and the coming joy of celebrating Christmas. It is in these moments that I can allow the love of God to fill me with hope, and change my outlook on the dark winter days.

—SCOTT HORTON

God, may I allow your love to fill me with hope this Advent. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent

Out of Darkness, Patience

INTRODUCTION

In Sunday's second reading from the Book of James, we are urged to be patient as we wait for the coming of the Lord...just as the farmer waits patiently for the ripening of his crops.

This past Summer I drove through the heart of central Washington on my way to a family wedding in Yakima. For miles and miles we passed fields of grain, corn and potatoes all growing until the day of their harvest. The seeds planted by the farmer were doing what the farmer expected them to do. As we descended into the Yakima valley, the hills around us were like a patchwork quilt of vineyards and orchards.

In Sunday's gospel, John the Baptist is like a farmer preparing the soil and planting the seed as he urges the people to repent and be baptized to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. But in the end, it is John, the sower of the seed, who needs proof that Jesus is truly the promised Messiah. Unlike the farmer who can walk through his fields and vineyards and orchards and observe how things are growing, John is confined to prison. He wants to know if what he is hearing about Jesus is true, so he sends his disciples to Jesus to find out.

Share: *Recall something in your past that required patience.*

† **READ: Matt. 11:2-11**

Share: *Do you think Jesus turned out to be the person John predicted he would be?*

COMMENTARY

John dedicated his whole career to preparing the people and the world for Christ's arrival. I wonder if John knew that he, John, was the prophet spoken of by Isaiah. Scripture tells us he was "filled with the Spirit from birth." His father, Zachariah, knew about his son's future, because of his conversation with the angel, Gabriel. But there were no plans written down about how all of this was going to happen. How wonderful it must have been when Jesus made himself known to John at his baptism. For John, it must have been like the farmer seeing a healthy young plant emerging from the soil yet never tasting the fruit it produced. John had worked patiently for this day, but he still didn't know.

Share: *Are there questions in your life that have never been answered?*

REFLECTION

Did you ever think that maybe God had a plan for you before you were born? I think most parents look at their young children and dream of what they might someday become. If that child is nourished and loved...like a farmer tends to his crops, that child has a good chance to be the best person he or she can be. Sometimes the storms of life can cause damage, or floods can move things in an unplanned direction, but with patience and understanding, and God's unending love, we all can grow out of the dark soil of life into the Light of Christ.

Share: *How have you experienced God's participation in your life?*

Prayer: O Master Gardener, thank you for tending the soil of my life. Be near me and guide me so I may produce fruit pleasing to you. Amen.

Monday, December 15

Could This be Our Present?

† **Colossians 3:12**—*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

How often do the circumstances of our lives invite impatience! Deadlines, too much to do, too many commitments on our calendars, the stressed state of others as well as ourselves, the frightening realities of life in our own country and in the larger world can feel overwhelming. If this is where I allow my focus to be, I truly invite darkness into my day.

What would it mean to invite patience and gentleness into each day? What a magnificent Autumn with which we have been gifted this year. Its beauty has been a constant invitation to stop, take a deep breath, be here NOW. I find it so easy to live in the past or the future. Both of these can feed darkness, sadness, regret, worry. When I patiently open myself to this moment, the light of God's loving presence, companionship embraces me. Could this be the "present" God desires to give us this Advent?

—THERESE FENZL

*Give me patience, O Lord,
and embrace me with your presence. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 16

Our Patient Daily Practice

† **1Thess. 5:14**—*We urge you to encourage the timid, help the weak and be patient with everyone.*

In her statement as a candidate for leadership, one of our sisters, talking about her finance background, admitted, “I believe in the concept of budgeting, but not the practice.”

In the line above from his earliest written letter, Paul urges the Thessalonians to “be patient with everyone.” Everyone appreciates being on the receiving end of another’s patience. Believing in the concept is not enough.

Parents become patient over years of practice working with their children’s often quirky behaviors. Artists, builders, and composers develop patience through many attempts to produce creations that match their dreams, blueprints and visions. Beethoven, whose birthday is today, became a world- famous composer by refining his compositions, by continuing to create while physically unable to hear the notes he wrote on the score sheet. He kept practicing his art in good health and bad.

Like the Thessalonians, we will encourage timid neighbors and help the weak to become strong in Christ, by our patient daily practice, practice, practice.

—SR. JOAN SPIERING, RGS

Help me to grow in patience, Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, December 17

Hope isn't Distant

† **James 5:8**—*You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

When I read James 5:8, it lands differently now than it did earlier in my life. After sixty years, and a divorce that reshaped everything I thought was secure, patience has become less about waiting for something to get better and more about learning to breathe through what is. Wisdom has taught me that the heart doesn't become steady overnight; it's strengthened slowly, the way a tree grows sturdier after each storm.

“Establish your hearts” feels like an invitation to gather back the pieces of myself I once scattered—through fear, through trying too hard, through the ache of feeling unseen. Wisdom has whispered to me that God isn't in the rush to fix things, but in the quiet work of making me whole. And that steadiness, that rootedness, is something no one can take away.

As for “the coming of the Lord,” I hear it now as a reminder that God draws near in the ordinary—morning light on the kitchen table, the laughter of friends, the courage to start again. Hope isn't distant; it visits daily. And so I stand patient, heart slowly re-established, trusting that God meets me exactly where I am.

—TERESA NIPPOLT

Lord, help me to live in your time and not mine. Amen.

Thursday, December 18

A Work in Progress

† **Proverbs 19:11a**—*A man's patience gives him wisdom.*

Over the course of my career, I've interviewed tens of thousands of people. Nearly every person was lovely, willing to share their insights, hopes and fears and struggles.

I know if I were to see them again, in a line of traffic for example, and they cut me off, I would not be offended because I would remember their story and their struggles. I would know that in their heart they were not trying to offend me. In fact, they were probably not even thinking about me.

It's much easier for me to flash anger when a stranger offends me in traffic or elsewhere.

The wisdom I strive for is awareness. I try to remember that everyone, strangers and friends alike are dealing with some sort of struggle in their lives. I should not be offended, I should be patient.

Instead of being offended, I quietly offer a prayer that they will find peace in their life and help carrying their burden.

And sometimes, more than I'd like to admit, I ask God what the hell is wrong with that person??? I am a work in progress.

—PAT DOORIS

*Lord, give me the patience I need
to get through challenging times. Amen.*

Friday, December 19

Moments Like This

† **Psalm 37:7**—*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.*

Advent invites us into stillness — a sacred pause in the rush of life. In the cold quiet of winter, when the world seems to rest under a soft blanket of snow, we, too, are called to slow down and wait. This waiting is not empty; it is full of hope, trust, and quiet expectation.

Imagine a cozy cabin wrapped in snow, windows glowing with the golden light of a fire. Inside, an overstuffed chair faces the warmth and the world outside — the perfect place to sit in peaceful reflection. The gentle crackle of the fire becomes a rhythm for prayer, each spark a reminder of God's presence and promise.

In this season of anticipation, may we make time for moments like this — moments when we are still enough to feel.

—JENN LANGHUS
MADELEINE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

*Thank, you God, for those quiet moments
when I feel your presence. Amen.*

Saturday, December 20

Wait Patiently

† **Psalm 40:1**—*I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.*

My sister, Vickie, worked for many years as the evening head nurse at the only elder-care facility in Ashtabula County, Ohio. Vickie had a beautiful voice and would often sing for her patients at bedtime to help them sleep.

During the last ten to fifteen years of her life, she faced several medical problems of her own that required long stays in the hospital. One evening, I got a call from my mom telling me that Vickie was in the hospital and not responding to treatment. I rushed to the hospital to find out that I would have to wait my turn to see her. So I waited, patiently, and prayed to God to heal her. Eventually I got in to see her, but was disappointed to find her not responding to me. So, as she once sang to her patients, I began to sing to her...songs from an old Harry Belafonte record that we once performed in a grade school competition. The next morning Vickie was awake and talking. God had heard my prayers.

—KATHI LARSON

Slow me down Lord. Help me to patiently focus on you. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Out of Darkness, Light

INTRODUCTION

If you have ever been in love, you know the light that fills your heart and brings happiness to each day. But what happens when that love, and the person attached to it fails you or disappoints you? You find yourself plummeting down a deep hole...a black, endless pit...a dark cave.

On this final week of Advent, let's take time to focus on Joseph, the man chosen to be the earthly father of Jesus. He was a good and kind man who was deeply in love with Mary and planning to spend the rest of his life with her. We never think about the sadness, the disappointment, the heartache he must have felt when he found out she was pregnant, and not by him. How dark his life became. We never think of Joseph as having the same sleepless nights that we have, when things don't go as we have planned. We toss and turn with a mixture of emotions. We try to find solutions on our own, but they never materialize. It is often at that darkest moment when God intervenes, just as the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and brought joy and peace back into his life by explaining the miraculous plan.

Share: *When has God brought light into your darkness?*

† **READ: Matt. 1:18-24**

Share: *Do you have any new insights or thoughts on this reading that you would like to share?*

COMMENTARY

Since we know how the story ends, we usually don't dwell on the darkness that Joseph must have felt when Mary told him she was pregnant and he was not the father of her baby. He loved her and didn't want to expose her to the public, so he decided to quietly divorce her. We don't know if she tried to explain the situation to him, or if she found it too difficult to understand herself, to know what to say or do. How relieved she must have felt when Joseph shared the angel's message with her. Now she could enjoy Joseph's love and support, and he would be by her side as she assumed her role as the mother of Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Share: *Have you ever been in a complex situation when you experienced God's intervention?*

REFLECTION

We all experience dark times in our lives. It could be a relationship that isn't going smoothly. It could be an illness, or financial problems. It could be the darkness of a world we no longer understand. It could be a disagreement with someone we love. Whatever the darkness is, we would like to "divorce" ourselves from the situation and move on. But it doesn't always work that way. We must place our trust in God and believe that God knows everything about us and loves us with an unimaginable love. God is always waiting for us to put our trust in him. He will always eventually, bring light into our lives...perhaps even in the form of a dream.

Share: *Have you ever had a dream that made a difference in your life?*

Prayer: As we celebrate the birth of your son, we give thanks for Joseph and for all the people in our lives who love and support us each day. Amen.

Loosening the grip

† **Psalm 27:1**—*The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?*

God is the light that shines into our darkness, our fears, our anxiety. Easy and lovely to say, but so hard to let him do that! Fear and worry were by my side throughout my life. I didn't trust God to be kind to me. It was only after my faith deepened and I opened my heart to God that I could slowly soften my grip on fear, and surrender to and accept God's will. It still isn't always easy, and I still want to let God know what he should do at times, but I know I can trust him. With everything that is happening in the world, both near and far, I know that God walks with us, suffers with us, and gives us grace to continue on. He brings good into hard times. "Be not afraid, I go before you, always."

—JANET BROWN

*Remind me often, that you, my Lord and God,
are always with me. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 23

Quiet Darkness

† **John 1:4-5**—*What came to be through him 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.*

Normally, as soon as I enter a dark room, I flip on the light. It's habit (and for safety). But what if I just stopped and stood still? My eyes adjust to the darkness, and I begin to see differently. I notice sounds I never heard before and smells I usually rush right past. I even notice slight breezes in the air and temperature changes.

Although my mind pushes me to move me along and get to unfinished tasks, I can choose to stay. Memories of the current and distant past rush in. People who are struggling and my own challenges, loved ones no longer present, fond and difficult thoughts...there is so much on my mind! As my legs get tired and I have to sit on the floor, my mind is finally exhausted and stops with all the to-dos, memories, and future fears.

There is nothing left to think or do. In this quiet darkness, a subtle, powerful presence unfolds itself. It has always been there—giving, loving, embracing. Alive now and always. Manifest in Jesus Christ and each of us.

—DEACON MIKE

*O Holy One, in the darkness or in the light,
make your presence known to me. Amen.*

Maybe, our Dawn is Close

† **Isaiah 9:2**—*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of shadow of death, a light has dawned.*

There seems to be a darkness that has descended upon our country and our world.

Some say it is a lack of compassion, never ending wars, along with a lack of universal truth.

Maybe we would rather not think about all the turmoil and hate and just turn off our minds and our hearts. I often feel overwhelmed by the negative and the need to cocoon myself and my family from the world. Denial is not a solution. Ideally, we need to look for the good. The light.

Jesus became man to be one with us and bring us closer to God. Closer to his love and light. If we allow his light and love to shine in us then, hopefully, we share that with others.

We might need to open our hearts and listen to others with different views and opinions. True communication and understanding can brighten our world and hopefully unite us all.

If we can keep our hearts open, maybe our dawn is very close.

—JACKIE DOORIS

Jesus, I pray that we let your light always shine in our hearts. Give us strength to reach out and share your light with others. Amen.

The Word Became Flesh

† **Isaiah 60:1**—*Arise, Shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.*

In my life journey, I have found the periphery of life to be the thrilling place of encounter with the new and with the beautiful. I love dark desert nights and the adventure of spelunking in the depths of caves. I love scuba diving to 100 meters below the surface and recklessly jumping from a plane at 10,000 feet. Of all the most thrilling and liminal spaces I have discovered, I love silence. Silence invites the word. And on one dark desert-ish night, perhaps in a hillside cave the silent hearts of Mary and Joseph welcomed The Word, the inner space of God, full of creative reason and self-sacrificing love, manifested in the most ordinary and surprising form: an infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. Like a burst of light that knows no limits in space or time, God's word wishes to fill every space and every time. Today and always let us seek a silent space in our heart where word and light are one.

—FR. BONAVENTURE

O Holy Child of Bethlehem, silence the world around me and enter the quiet chambers of my heart. Amen.

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