



### **WEEKLY STUDY December 17-23, 2023**

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

#### **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIGHT Advent 2023**

**Our sermon series for December is: It's a Wonderful Light. As we journey to Jesus' birth, we will encounter Zechariah, Elizabeth, John & Mary. We will look for the light in their stories that beckons to reflect brightly on our own.**

**In the tradition of Advent, light three candles this week – the Candle of Hope from Week 1, the Candle of Peace for Week 2, and how the Candle of Joy for Week 3. Choose one image of joy for you and hold it in your mind and heart, in God's presence.**

**Our scripture this week is: John 1:6-8**

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

- 1)** Advent signifies the approaching light to the world that is Jesus. It does this symbolically for us (as it has for centuries of Christians) by the progressing light of candles. This week, we have three candles brightening the darkness around us. Our candle this week is the Joy candle. We are reminded in the midst of waiting to "rejoice in the Lord." While we are still preparing for the coming of Jesus, we light up with joy at the thought of the coming of Jesus. We light this candle in the glow of hope from the first candle and the glow of peace from the second candle.

**Question: *What is your hope for joy – within yourself, in your family and among your loved ones, in your community, in our world? How do you picture joy? What are signs of joy you see around you?***

- 2)** I'm guessing all of us have favorite scripture. While in general the Gospel of John is not my favorite, I love the first chapter. I love the poetry and the imagery of John 1. I love the echoes of Genesis 1 and creation. And I love the role of John - a witness to the light but not the light himself. In her sermon Pastor Sam said for John and for us, this is a reminder of not making things about us while we witness to the light that breaks the darkness. She reminded us to check our egos. And also to let go of competitiveness and comparisons to others. She told us of the music teacher at the children's center sharing this quote, "A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle."

**Question: Do you have examples of leaders who want the spotlight on themselves instead of pointing it away from themselves and keeping the focus on God's gift of light? Have there been times when you have felt you could not acknowledge the light of another because it might diminish your light?**

- 3) Pastor Sam used several objects to illustrate the variety of lights we can be in the world. We can be the sparkly lights that bring fun and joy. We can be the lighter that gets the light burning in others. We can be the nightlight that keeps vigil through the dark times. We can be the candle that sustains with a slow and steady burn. We can be the match that may be running out but still has light to give. We can be the light behind stained glass that reflects all the colors of the world.

**Question: Are there other images of light you might add? What kind of light do you feel you are right now?**

- 4) Pastor Sam reminded us of what Luke had to say about John. When people came to John asking what they should do he answered:  
“...Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”  
John said to the tax collectors, “...Don't collect any more than you are required to.”  
John said to the soldiers, “...Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely...”  
We shine light in darkness when we resist injustice and oppression. We light up the darkness when we address issues of homelessness, and hunger, of discrimination and hatred, of violence and exclusion.  
Sam reminded us that there are many speaking out and acting out in hatred and breeding darkness in our world. She said, “Can we get rid of the darkness in the world or in the hearts of others? No. But we can push back on it, resist injustice and oppression by being the light of Christ.” And she concluded the sermon by stating, “to love people and satisfy the necessities of their flesh may be the only true way to testify to, witness to, and receive the word made flesh.”

**Question: Consider Pastor Sam's concluding statement. What would you commit to doing in order to love others and address their needs?**

**Prayer: (I find the following prayer, written by Rev. Larry J. Peacock in the book *Openings: A Daybook of Saints, Sages, Psalms and Prayer Practices* to be particularly appropriate for the third week of Advent when we light the candle of Joy)**

*“O God, let some joy loose. Let it rise to the surface and shake us out of preoccupation with lists and tasks. Forgive us for our heavy hearted approach to your season of joy and light. Help us not to let long lists and calendar events overwhelm the wonder of your birth. Smiling God, let some joy loose in us, and let it rub off on others. Amen”*

**Weekly Challenge: This week challenge yourself to daily find and claim signs of joy. Turn out the lights. Light three Advent Candles. Notice how the light increases with each candle you light. Silently take time to find your quiet center. Refresh yourself in God's presence.**

*(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)*