

# RESTORE BRIGHTNESS

*An Advent Journey  
from Lament to Hope*



*A collaboration between  
CBAC Youth and Family  
& CBAC Clergy Formation*



## RESTORE BRIGHTNESS

# *Psalm 13*

- 1 How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?
- 2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
- 3 Look on me and answer, Lord my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
- 4 and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- 5 But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- 6 I will sing the Lord's praise,  
for he has been good to me.



# RESTORE BRIGHTNESS

## The Heart

As we continue to navigate the unique challenges brought on by the pandemic, we have felt the need to provide space and tools to lament, and release.

Using Psalm 13 as a framework for the Biblical practice of Lament, Restore Brightness is an Advent Journey from Lament to Hope; A journey forged through the coming of the Christ, then, and now.

A collaborative project from the CBAC department of Clergy Formation and Wellness, and the CBAC department of Youth and Family, 'Restore Brightness' has been designed for congregations, small groups, and youth groups alike, to deepen engagement with the Advent season.

## How to use This Resource

This resource is organized around the four candles in Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, Love and Christ. In it, you will find short video teachings, longer devotional-style teachings, candle lighting readings, and contemplative practices that can be used each week in Advent. As well, we've packed each week with our favorite Advent Resources for you to explore further and incorporate as you see fit.

Our prayer is that through this Advent Journey, God will begin to *Restore Brightness* to our hearts and communities.



# RESTORE BRIGHTNESS

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## WEEK 1

# HOPE

### **Psalm 13:1–2a, 3–6 TPT**

#### **Depression**

13 I'm hurting, Lord—will you forget me forever? How much longer, Lord? Will you look the other way when I'm in need?

2 How much longer must I cling to this constant grief? I've endured this shaking of my soul. So how much longer will my enemy have the upper hand?

#### **Intercession**

3 Take a good look at me, Yahweh, my God, and answer me! Breathe your life into my spirit. Bring light to my eyes in this pitch-black darkness or I will sleep the sleep of death.

4 Don't let my enemy proclaim, "I've prevailed over him." For all my adversaries will celebrate when I fall.

5 I have always trusted in your kindness, so answer me. I will spin in a circle of joy when your salvation[d] lifts me up.

6 I will sing my song of joy to you, Yahweh, for in all of this you have strengthened my soul. My enemies say that I have no Savior, but I know that I have one in you!

### **Isaiah 9:2 Amplified Bible**

The people who walk in [spiritual] darkness will see a great Light; Those who live in the dark land, The Light will shine on them."

### **Luke 1:67,78–79 NLT**

#### **Zechariah's Prophecy**

67 Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: ...

78 Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,[b] 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."





## Teaching

***Rarely are we ever in complete darkness. It may seem like it, but there is always some light present.***

The Pandemic has been a dark time for our world. The news of communities and countries around the world being devastated by Covid-19 has been constant. Canada, Atlantic Canada, our communities, our families, our lives and how we live have also been impacted. The darkness of loss and death, uncertainty of jobs and the economy, isolation and separation from loved ones, concern for the effects on children and seniors, growing issues of mental health and poverty, outrage at the reality of injustice and racism, fear of the unknown, anger at the limitations. It has been a hard season. A traumatic season, A dark season. It can seem like we are sitting and walking in darkness. **Where is the light?**

When we think of Christmas we usually focus on the Light. However, the reality is that it was a time of darkness. Zechariah in his prophecy about the birth of Jesus wrote about a people "who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death". Isaiah wrote about "the people who walk in darkness..." Jesus was born into a dark world filled with violence, death, grief, anguish, anxiety, and fear. A world where the light of God seemed absent.

### **Zechariah's Prophecy Luke 1:67,78-79 NLT**

*67 Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: ...*

*78 Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,[b] 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."*

# HOPE

FINDING LIGHT IN DARKNESS

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It felt like sitting in darkness! In October 2020 when 5 people died in my family, not covid related, in a span of 9 days. Two of the deaths were expected and 3 were a surprise.

I can truly say that last Advent I felt like someone sitting and walking in darkness. My eyes couldn't see clearly the way forward. Things seemed dark.

On December 4th, I went on a one-week silent retreat to seek God., I felt like a zombie, lost and numb. It felt like enemies were crouching at the door of my soul waiting to devour me and plunge me into despair and sadness. I had not felt this low and empty in a very long time. I was experiencing the darkness of grief and loss.

*I could lament with the Psalmist,  
"I'm hurting, Lord—will you forget me forever?  
How much longer, Lord?  
Will you look the other way when I'm in need?  
2 How much longer must I cling to this constant  
grief?  
I've endured this shaking of my soul. ...*

*3 Take a good look at me, Yahweh, my God, and  
answer me!  
Breathe your life into my spirit.  
Bring light to my eyes in this pitch-black  
darkness  
or I will sleep the sleep of death.*

I began to realize that darkness is a significant theme in the bible. Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus' birth took on new meaning. He wrote, "***The people who walk in [spiritual] darkness will see a great Light; Those who live in the dark land, The Light will shine on them.***" *Isaiah 9:2* Amplified Bible

In the beginning all I could do was sit in the darkness. However, I began to **seek God in the darkness** with the help of my spiritual director.

As I sat in darkness, internally and externally, crying out to God, waiting in silence for God to come to me. As I saw my need and opened myself to God's presence, stripped away my pretense, and allowed the Holy Spirit to come close and minister to my soul. The Light of God's presence broke through! God's word came to me "Don't be afraid of the darkness, I'm here". The eyes of my heart began to perceive more of the light of God's presence.

The reality of the darkness can be unsettling. In an article called "Darkness: The World in Which Christ Was Born", David Schrock describes the oppression the people of Israel were under at the time of Jesus' birth. He writes,

"...but when we consider that Christ came into the darkness to bring light, the truth is staggering beautiful. For we all face seasons of darkness, and God in the flesh knows exactly what that looks like and feels like."

Remembering that the light of Christ came in the darkness of night gives us hope that God can still pour light into our hearts and shine light into our lives. No matter how dark it may be, no matter where the darkness comes from, God is the light who enlightens everyone, and has come to take up residence in the lives of those who look to Christ."

As one who sat in darkness, I can testify to the reality and power of the Light--Jesus' presence and power-- when we seek him in the midst of our darkness and the world's darkness. My life has been transformed by my experience of God's light in my darkness.

Being a Christian does not exempt us from times of darkness. In the dark we learn to see the light. Even when it is darkest there is some light. Our eyes learn to see in the dark.



Our hope is that God has not abandoned us in the darkness but comes to us and illuminates our dark places. We do not have to fear the dark. We can declare with the psalmist, ***"You light a lamp for me. The Lord, my God, lights up my darkness."*** **Psalm 18:28** God sends his light in many forms, including his presence, his word, and his people.

We can celebrate the reality of the Light of Christ being born into our dark places. ***"For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ."*** **2 Corinthians 4:6** The light of God has come, and He will lead us to hope and peace.

May we be like Isaiah and Zachariah this Advent and Christmas season, acknowledging the reality of the darkness and its impact, but believing and living in the reality of the Light of Jesus--God with us in the darkness. ***"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."*** **John 1:5**



## Activation: *Reflection on Darkness*

**Part 1** – Sit in darkness (or reflect on what sitting in darkness is like)

- What do we feel when we are in the dark? Light?
- How does the world seem dark? What are the places of light in the world?
- What are your dark places? / Where do you feel light?
- The psalmist knew a lot about dark places. Read Ps 13:1-4
- What is the psalmist experiencing / feeling?

**Part 2** – Read **Isa 9:2** and **Lk 1:67,78-79**

- What do you think they meant when they talk about people sitting and walking in darkness?
- Can you describe a time when you felt like you were walking or sitting in darkness?

**Part 3** – Read **Ps 13:4-6**

- What is the Psalmist experiencing?
- How has the Psalmist experienced God's light?
- What is the Psalmist's hope?



# For the Lighting of the Candle

Scripture: Luke 1:67,78-79

Zechariah's Prophecy Luke 1:67,78-79 NLT



## Person 1:

The reality of the darkness can be unsettling, "...when we consider that Christ came into the darkness to bring light, the truth is staggering beautiful. For we all face seasons of darkness, and God in the flesh knows exactly what that looks like and feels like."

## Person 2:

Remembering that the light of Christ came in the darkness of night gives us hope that God can still pour light into our hearts and shine light into our lives.

## Person 3:

No matter how dark it may be, no matter where the darkness comes from, God is the light who enlightens everyone, and has come to take up residence in the lives of those who look to Christ."

## Person 1:

HOPE is not an end to the darkness, or an absence of darkness.

## Person 2:

HOPE is the presence of Jesus, our light, in the darkness.

## Prayer:

*One person or more can lead in prayer*

Loving God, creator of the world  
You said let there be light in Darkness.

We are a people who walk in darkness, and we need to know your light once again. Our experience of Covid-19 pandemic has seemed like darkness in many ways.

Jesus, light of the World, shine in the dark places around us, (... Ask people to name how they have seen darkness around them e.g. like the covid-19 pandemic, lost jobs, loss, sickness, lost opportunities, death, ...)

Please Lord Jesus shine in the dark places inside of us. In our...(Ask people to name how they have felt the darkness inside of them. E.g. pain, loss, grief, fear, uncertainty, ...feeling isolated)

Shine in us and around us Lord Jesus.  
You are our Emmanuel-God with us.  
You are our Hope.

Restore your brightness in us!

## Additional Resources

- The Bible Project 'The Psalms'  
<https://youtu.be/j9phNEaPrv8>
- Suggested Songs & Carols:
  - Way Maker
  - Silent Night
  - O Little town of Bethlehem
- David Schrock, *The World in Which Christ was Born*,  
<https://davidschrock.com/2011/12/12/darkness-the-world-in-which-christ-was-born/>



WEEK 2

# PEACE

**Psalms 13**

**Isaiah 9:2,6**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the shadow of death, a light has dawned....For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.

**John 16:33**

I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world.

**Luke 2:14**

Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth, peace to men on whom His favor rests.

**Philippians 4: 6&7:**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”



# PEACE

FINDING PEACE IN LAMENT

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## Introduction

The Prophet Isaiah spoke about the longed-for Saviour who was coming into the world. He began his proclamation with these words recorded for us in **Isaiah 9:2** **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.”**

Christmas has become for us a bright, festive celebration and so it should be. Jesus, the Light of the World has come to give us hope, peace, joy and love. Isaiah’s words, however, remind us that the world was very dark when Jesus came the first time. The Hebrew people suffered under Roman tyranny. They were abused and abducted, oppressed and robbed. Fearing for their very lives, they literally lived in the shadow of death. (A clip of the opening scene of the movie “Nativity” when the Roman soldiers charged into Nazareth could be shown here.)

Our world is dark this Christmas, dark with covid and all its complications; dark with all the factions covid has exposed. Your personal world may be dark with other issues. However, the same Jesus who came into the world physically to save people centuries ago, wants to come into our corporate world and into our personal worlds to save us now. **His is an ongoing salvation. The salvation Jesus brings wasn’t a one-off for the Hebrew people a long time ago. And it’s not just a one-off salvation reserved for us when we die. Jesus came to be saving us daily, in our ordinary lives.**

Sometimes He removes the difficult circumstances that threaten us and sometimes He doesn’t. But no matter what those circumstances are, His is the saving power that keeps our circumstances from destroying us.

Jesus can and wants to rescue us from fear and anxiety, sorrow and suffering and give us peace. How can we let Him in to all that we’re experiencing and begin to know His peace? We start by naming our feelings. Naming our feelings helps bring us into the reality of who we are and what we need.

## About Laments

We sometimes get the mistaken idea that it’s wrong for people who have faith in God to have what we consider to be “negative” feelings. But, a study of the Gospel accounts of Jesus shows that Jesus who was fully human and fully God, felt sorrow and grief, indignation and anger and agony in His soul so great, He sweat great drops of blood. Furthermore, God has included a Book in the Bible called Lamentations. Lamenting is a way of putting our worst feelings right out there in front of God without trying to pretty them up. Several of David’s Psalms are laments. It can be helpful to reflect on one of David’s Psalms of Lament when we are feeling distress.

***Listen to Psalm 13 as it is read out loud [Read Aloud].***

## About Psalm 13

John Phillips writes in the first book of his commentary series “Exploring the Psalms” that “when David wrote this Psalm, he was exhausted and depressed. His troubles with King Saul had gone on year after year and he was dispirited and discouraged. David had already had to do many relentless things to escape his foe.



This Psalm came out of the extremity of his soul. He simply could not go on; not for another day, not for another hour, not even for another minute." At least, that's how David felt when he started to write this Psalm. Partway through, David began to pursue God for the help he needed. He cried: "Look on me and answer, O Lord, my God." And things began to change. It's as though David went to the very edge of what it looks like without God and realized again, that God was his only hope. After that, God graciously restored David's faith. David was once again able to know that God loved him, and that God would save him. You'll find this same pattern in David's other Psalms of lament, complaints loud with raw emotion, a turning to God, and then, an inner restoration of faith and peace.

***Let's read Psalm 13 again, this time responsively.***

**Leader:**

"How long, O, Lord? Will You forget me forever?  
How long will You hide Your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
And every day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

**People:**

Look on me and answer, O Lord, my God.  
Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death;  
My enemy will say: "I have overcome him"  
And my foes will rejoice when I fall.

**All:**

But I trust in Your unfailing love,  
My heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord for He has been good to me."

## About Peace

The same David who wrote Psalm 13 later wrote these words in Psalm 29:11: "The Lord gives strength to His people, the Lord blesses His people with peace.". We long to exchange our weariness and strain for peace. How can we do this? The Lord blesses us with peace when we turn to Him, trust Him, and surrender everything to Him.

The same prophecy in Isaiah Chapter 9 that begins: "**The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the shadow of death, a light has dawned.**" Later says: "**For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.**" Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

The Scriptures tell us that when Christ comes visibly to earth the second time, He will establish His Kingdom of peace over all the earth. When Jesus came the first time, He made it possible for His Kingdom to begin here on earth in the hearts and lives of those who know and love Him. He did this with His death and resurrection which removed the barrier of sin between us and God and removed the barrier of death between us and His heavenly Kingdom.





# PEACE

FINDING PEACE IN LAMENT

Anyone who has welcomed Jesus into their life as Savior and Lord, has been made a citizen of His heavenly Kingdom...

## **...And can experience his Peace.**

Christmas angels knew Jesus was coming to make this possible. When Jesus was born, they proclaimed; ***“Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth, peace to men on whom His favor rests.”*** (Luke 2:14)

During His teaching, healing time on earth, Jesus often invited people to experience His Kingdom peace. He described the peace He wants to give us as something greater than any help the world can offer.

In John 14:27, **He says: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”** Rather than teaching that His peace will remove all suffering, Jesus taught that we can experience His peace in our suffering.

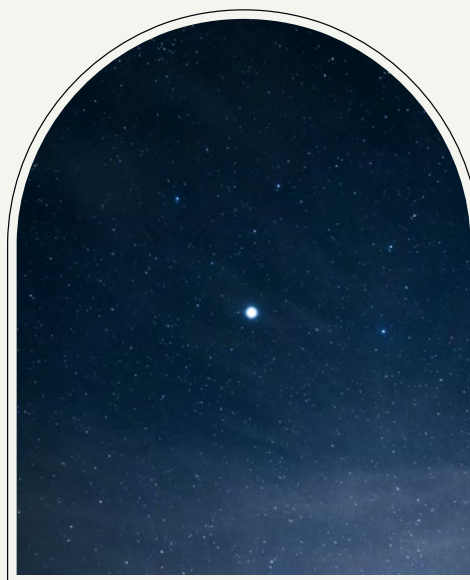
In John 16:33 Jesus says: **“I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world.”** The Apostle Paul experienced the peace of Christ in his trials and troubles. He called it a peace that passes understanding because you can't find any reason for it in your circumstances. Here's how Paul puts it in Philippians 4: 6&7: **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

To exchange our weariness and strain for the peace Jesus wants to give us, we begin by naming our feelings and identifying our anxious thoughts. We turn to God and ask Him to help us with these, remembering, like David did, all the ways He has helped us in the past. We remember that God is good; that He loves us; that He is for us. We trust Him to help us, believing He is even able to bring good out of hardship. Stepping off the throne of our lives we release everything to Jesus our rightful Monarch and Lord and let Him reign in our distress and circumstances. Jesus, the Light of the World and Prince of Peace came and comes again to conquer our darkness and give us His peace.

## **Let's Pray:**

Father, it's hard for us to give our lives over to You. We want to be in control. Forgive us for not trusting You enough. Give us more faith; faith to believe that You are able to help us with our troubles; faith to believe that You are even able to bring good out of them. Help us to surrender everything to You and give us peace. Amen.

(Songs: “All to Jesus I Surrender”  
“It is Well with My Soul”)



# Activation 1: *Praying Psalm 13*

How would Psalm 13 read if we made it our lament over covid or any one of our troubles? Invite participants to spend a few minutes re-writing Psalm 13 in their own words. Or, read aloud this re-written version of Psalm 13 and invite participants to respond silently in their hearts.

## Psalm 13 – A 'my words' Prayer

*How long will this go on, Lord?  
Nothing's the same. Everything I used to know has been up-ended.  
So many losses. I feel like even You have abandoned me;  
that You've abandoned the world.*

*How long is this going to last? I'm so tired of it. I'm so tired of the fear, the worry, the constant upheaval. I'm so tired. I feel like You have turned away from me and left me flailing in a pit of weariness, anxiety, and despair.*

*Thinking about the future gives me a knot in my stomach. Sadness has settled like a lead blanket against my heart.*

*How long will this thing get the better of me, Lord? It feels like it's robbing me of my life.*

*O God, please look at me! Help me! Save me! Give me back my life! Restore my soul and make my face bright once again. Don't let this destroy me! I don't want the enemy to win and neither do You. We can't have people who don't believe in You gloating and jeering "So where's your God now?"*

*Despite it all, I choose to trust you, Father God. I know you love me. I know You have never stopped loving me. I know You will help me. You have helped me before, again and again. And You will help me now. Thanks for coming close, Lord. You have always been so good to me! My heart is starting to relax. Thank you for restoring me with brightness and peace.*

*Amen.*



## Activation 2: *Visual Lectio*

Show an image of a person in distress.

Play soft instrumental music during the reflection time.

Take a few quiet moments to reflect on this photo.

What is the person in the picture feeling? How does the picture remind you of feelings you have had during the pandemic?



### For the Lighting of the Candle:

**Scripture:** Hear again these words from Isaiah 9: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. For unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be on His shoulders, and He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

**Lighting the Candle:** Today we light the candle of Peace, remembering that Jesus, the Light of the World, is also the Prince of Peace. May Jesus come into our hearts and lives in new ways this Christmas. May we each receive Him as our Lord and reigning Monarch, surrendering our troubles to Him; trusting Him to restore our souls and brighten our lives with His peace.

**Prayer:** “Now may the Lord of peace Himself, give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.” (2 Thessalonians 3:16)

## Additional Resources

- Movie clip: Opening scenes of the movie “Nativity” when Roman soldiers terrorize people in the village of Nazareth. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEDc2jmYcUc>
- Digital image of a person in distress
- Songs:
  - “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus.
  - “All to Jesus I Surrender”
  - “It is Well with My Soul”

## WEEK 3

# Joy

### Psalm 13:5

But I trust in your unfailing love.  
I will rejoice because you have rescued  
me.

### Exodus 15:1-21

....19 When Pharaoh's horses, chariots,  
and charioteers rushed into the sea, the  
Lord brought the water crashing down on  
them. But the people of Israel had walked  
through the middle of the sea on dry  
ground!

20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's  
sister, **took a tambourine and led all the  
women as they played their  
tambourines and danced.** 21 And Miriam  
sang this song:

“Sing to the Lord,  
for he has triumphed gloriously;  
he has hurled both horse and rider  
into the sea.”



## Teaching

As we move through the thirteenth Psalm, we see that it points to the response we should have as we respond to God's actions of rescuing. The Psalmist is reminding their audience to rejoice because they have experienced rescue by God's hands. The story from Exodus is a people's poetic response as they experienced rescue by God's hands.

Although at first glance, it may appear that Miriam's song was celebrating the dramatic loss of Egyptian life, her celebration stems from the incredible preservation of life that she experienced. Her people had been oppressed, and her poetic account of the destruction of the Egyptian army was to celebrate the overthrowing of an oppressive empire, and the freedom that her people were experiencing. Their song was a celebration of God's power, presence, and reign. God had delivered the Israelite people. After centuries of oppression, they were finally free!

As the people rushed to escape Egypt, notice that the women had all packed their tambourines. As families prepared to leave their homes and set off into incredible uncertainty, they likely left much of their personal belongings. However, the people knew that they would need to be prepared to celebrate, and so the women were sure to bring their tambourines. And in those moments after God's rescue at the Red Sea, they pulled out the tambourines and led the people in a joyous celebration! They were ready to celebrate and experience. ***God's actions of deliverance had restored brightness to the Israelites.***

Likewise, as we move into the New Testament, and focus on the stories of Jesus and the Church in Luke-Acts, we see a similar pattern:

***As Jesus moves in the world, we see that through Him, the God of Joy has come near.***

Consider the interaction between Mary and Elizabeth in Luke 1. John the Baptist, while still in his mother's womb, leaps for joy at the sound of Mary's voice. Like her namesake Miriam, Mary the mother of Jesus, breaks out in song as she celebrates God's actions. Throughout Luke-Acts, we see numerous encounters where Jesus demonstrates the Kingdom's arrival by healing, and people respond in joy and praise. Jesus is the joy-bringer.

As people of God, we are to respond to God's activity in our world by expressing our joy in celebration. It seems, however, that throughout the pandemic, many of us have forgotten that Jesus is the Joy-bringer. We spend more time wishing that we could go back, and we fail (or are afraid) to ask "What's next?" We dread the next news cycle, and miss out on opportunities to reflect on what God has been doing. God has not been silent or passive in this season, and there is much we can and should be celebrating.

***As we look to the One who is the Joy-Bringer, may we remember that our prayer to restore brightness will be answered as we look for ways to be celebrating.***

## For the Lighting of the Candle:

### Speaker 1:

Our Advent wreath is growing brighter as more candles are lit. The candles remind us that God is close and active in our world, and the growing light tells us that God answers our prayer to restore brightness.

As we light the first candle, our memories of God's faithfulness inform our hope that the Lord will continue to do great things for us.

*Light the first candle.*

### Speaker 2:

The Psalmist writes: "I have trusted in your faithful love; my heart will rejoice in your deliverance." As we trust in the Lord's faithful love, we trust in the peace that God promises.

*Light the second candle.*

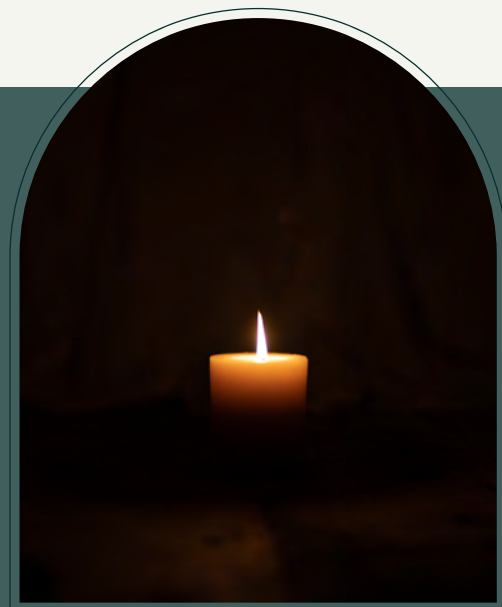
### Speaker 3:

We echo the words of Mary's poem: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." As the people of God, we welcome Jesus, who shows us that God is the Joy-Bringer.

*Light the third candle.*

### Prayer:

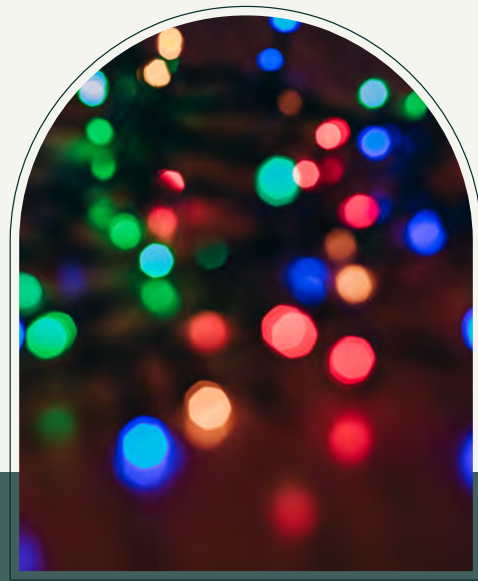
*Lord God, we long to experience the joy that you promise for each one of us. May we learn together that authentic joy comes only from you. May the growing light of these candles inspire us to remember your actions that demonstrate your faithful love and continued presence. Help us to express our joy through intentional actions of celebration.*





## Activation:

Celebration is an important response, as we practice joy. As Jesus shows us that God is the Joy-Bringer, personal and communal actions of celebration serve to fix the actions in our memories. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God's people celebrate in a variety of ways as they respond to God's actions of faithfulness. From composing new songs to building stone monuments, God's people have a long history of finding reasons to bring out the tambourines!



## On your own:

Take time to look back over the last year. Grab a journal and a calendar, and spend some time reflecting on these questions:

- What are you thankful for? Who has blessed you? (List at least 10 items)
- How has God shown up in your life?
- When have you experienced blessings in the midst of struggle or waiting?

## With a Group

### Story Telling

Hearing one another's stories is an important and significant way to be reminded of God's faithfulness. Invite participants to reflect on how they have seen God care for them over the last year, and to share these stories after one another. Through stories, we can name and notice God's activity in the midst of our congregations. It's important that our churches intentionally cultivate celebratory practices, especially in the midst of situations of pain and suffering.

Consider adding a liturgical response, after each person shares, such as "His love endures forever" (Psalm 136).

### Sing carols with Instruments

If you have a variety of classroom-style instruments on hand (such as tambourines, drums, maracas, etc), pass them out to people in your group (make sure to include children if present!) Invite people to use the instruments as you sing a couple of Advent or Christmas carols. Our emotions of joy not only help us feel moved, but also get our bodies ready to physically move. The expression of joy awakens our senses, and energizes our mind and body. Through the use of instruments and dance, we can learn to express our joy.

Follow the example of Miriam and other women who used tambourines to express their praise to God!

# Activations

## With a Group Continued..

### Wall Display

(adapted from Lucy Moore and Jane Leadbetter's *Messy Christmas*)

#### You will need ...

- gold or silver gel pens
- pattern for simple origami boxes
- paper of different colors in sizes to make a box and a lid (squares of wrapping paper work well)
- ribbon, glue, double sided tape

Encourage people to reflect on how God's faithfulness and provision **brings them joy**.

Invite them to write down their reasons for joy on one of the smaller pieces of paper. Make this paper into the base of the box using the origami folding and glue, and make a second larger piece of paper into the lid, using the same pattern. Fit them together so that the prayer is hidden both in the folds of the paper and under the lid. Have participants write their name over the lid of the box in silver or gold gel pen. Tie it up in ribbon and add it to a wall display using double-sided tape.

## Additional Resources

- Origami Box Tutorial (activation 4)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miKVWRH6Jzc>
- Messy Christmas, by Lucy Moore & Jane Leadbetter (<https://www.amazon.ca/Messy-Christmas-Lucy-Moore/dp/0830841393>)
- Suggested Songs and Carols
  - Joy to the World
  - Hark the Harold Angels Sing



WEEK 4

# *Love* + *Christ*

**Psalm 13: 5-6**

5 But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
6 I will sing the Lord's praise,  
for he has been good to me.

**Hebrews 4:15-16**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.

**Philippians 2:5-8**

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in **human likeness**, 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

## Teaching

Throughout this Advent series, we have been moving through Psalm 13. This Psalm is of course, a psalm of Lament, and many scholars believe David wrote it at the very beginning of his reign as king. A reader can only imagine the complex emotions he would have experienced with this major transition in his life.

I imagine, these emotions are not unlike some of the emotions many of us have felt in the wake of all the change, transition, loss, and disruption brought on from the past season. But what I find so valuable in this psalm, is the way David expresses the full range of Human emotions to the Lord.

We see him begin by expressing frustration and anger, a sense of abandonment, a sense of hopelessness, and a sense of anxiety. However, as David moves through his lament, we see these emotions begin to shift. We see hopelessness turn to hope-FULL-ness; we see David expressing thankfulness, a sense of feeling secure, optimistic, trusting, confident, loved.

As one commentary states: **“This is the psalm that describes the journey from self to God, from despair to delight, from feeling abandoned to feeling affirmed. It begins with pain and ends with praise. Moaning gives way to music.”** This week in Advent, as we celebrate our nearness to the coming of Christ by lighting the ‘Love’ and ‘Christ’ Candles, we do this in recognition that Jesus, of course, is that bridge.

Jesus, in his shared humanity with us, the one whom we call God incarnate, is the bridge from self to God. He is the bridge from despair to delight; from feeling abandoned to feeling affirmed. He is the bridge that can take a story that begins with pain, and write conclusion that ends with praise.

***He is the reason our collective moaning gives way to music.***

**Philippians 2:5-8 says:**

**“5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!**

In his book, *Honest Advent*, Scott Erickson says about the nature of The Christmas Story, “it is a story about pregnancy, family, incarnation, birth, God with us..” (2) In essence, it is a story about the ‘stuff-of-humanity’ colliding with the ‘stuff-of-heaven.’

Throughout the Christmas story, we see so many examples of the daily monotony of humanity, colliding with the Divine. Reflect for a moment on the intertwining of earth and heaven in just this one event: A normal everyday woman’s life collides with an angel – a messenger from heaven. She finds herself to be with child by the power of the holy spirit. She carries this child for nine months, navigating family drama, social stigma, rejection. But in the middle of it all, there is yet another supernatural pregnancy in her cousin Elizabeth!

On the night of Jesus’ birth, the story is at once a cast of labor pains, barn animals, and your everyday first-time-dad, as well as heavenly host, supernatural cosmic phenomena, and the fulfilling of ancient prophecy. And Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, is the central fixture of the story. He is the meeting point between Earth and heaven; humanity and divine.

Jesus was at once fully God and fully human. Fully divine, and fully created. This paradox speaks to the nature of God’s feelings towards us, as His ‘intentionally human’ creation, whom he sees as “very good.” This collision of earth and heaven, humanity and divine, seems to be God’s heart from the very beginning.



# LOVE + CHRIST

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

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Sometimes in Christian culture we can tend to see our humanity as a hindrance. The goal of Christian spirituality can sometimes be cast as an attempt to overcome, subdue, or escape our humanity. The hope of everlasting life in Heaven (while truly a beautiful hope!), can also become the scapegoat for fully embracing the gift of life here, *embodied*.

To think in these terms is to miss the fullness of The Christmas Story; a story of God's love for humanity, embodied in **the 'God who IS.'** As Erickson notes, "How does God restore what [God] loves? By being *with* what God loves." (124). God sent himself, to humanity, as humanity. God restored what He loves by joining what he loves – us! To fully embrace the love of God offered through *Immanuel*, is to fully embrace our own humanity, in all of its 'humanness.'

## ***So what does this mean for us now?***

**Hebrews 4:15–16 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin."**

The gospels give us a picture of a man's life that was marked not by pious stoicism, but by the full range of human emotion and experience. We assume a normal boyhood full of chores, older-brother-responsibilities, family expectations, friends, and puberty. We find a young man who slips away from his parents out of adolescent curiosity. An adult that has friends, asks for help, weeps over loss, laughs around tables, becomes angry, and who is tempted with the exact same temptations you and I know well as humans.

Jesus experienced the full range of human experience, and yet, in all these human vulnerabilities, remained connected to his Father. There is an invitation for us, then, to experience the connection and loving affirmation of the Father, even in the deepest parts of our humanity.

***We have a Father that invites us, not to escape from our humanity, but to go deeper into it, with him.***

In the places of our deepest vulnerability, we find the bridge between us and God that Jesus builds. These are the spaces in which we find our moaning gives way to music. Could it be that He is restoring brightness to our eyes as we learn to embrace the fullness of our humanity, in all of its vulnerability, and see it how He sees it? As a gift. As intended. As an entry point for experiencing the love of the divine? Could it be that embracing the gift of our humanity a little more deeply this Advent season could in some way help us come to see God with us, the God who IS – Immanuel – a little more clearly?

***Restore Brightness, Oh God, as we learn to embrace the fullness of our humanity, just as you did Jesus, and experience your love, right in the middle of it.***

# For the Lighting of the Candle: *An Advent Poem*



## **Verse 1:**

Without the YES of a middle eastern, teenage girl;  
Without her body, her blood, her labour;  
There would be no infant.  
No God Incarnate – tethered to his own creation.  
No Silent Night.  
No Heavenly Host.

## **Verse 2:**

And if there is no babe in arms;  
There is no Prince of Peace.

No Carpenter's Son;  
There is no Mighty God.

No plain-clothed, blue collar, 'pick-up' rabbi;  
No Teacher,  
No Healer,  
No Wonderful Counsellor.

No Man;  
No Saviour.

## **Verse 3:**

And without the Man  
there could never be the Lamb.  
No Broken Body;  
No Table.  
No bread, no wine.

And Without the broken body  
There is no Third Day.  
No veil-tearer,  
No snake crusher,  
No Kingdom Come.

## **Verse 4:**

But Without the Wonder, the Holy Mystery,  
And the 'unknowing' of it all,  
It's just a story,  
It doesn't mean a thing.

Without our BELIEF;  
Without OUR YES;  
Without unifying our hearts to the birth, death, and  
resurrection of the 'God who IS,'  
God with us;  
Immanuel;  
There can be no transformation, no virgin birth  
In our own hearts.

No resurrection  
In our own bodies.

## **Verse 5:**

Without the Infant, there could never be the Man.  
Without the Man there could never be the Lamb,  
Without the Manger there could never be the Cross.

Without the one who 'IS,'  
There cannot be the One Who is Yet. To. Come.

*Selah*

*This Christmas, may you experience the wonder of the one  
who WAS, who IS, and who is YET to come.*



## Activation:

When we embrace our emotions, **we embrace our humanity**. Jesus, the bridge builder, invites us to feel things **with him**. Take some time to journal with the Lord. Invite him into the deepest parts of your humanity through these reflection questions.



## Part A: Journal Your Emotions

I. What am I anxious about?

II. What am I angry about?

III. What am I sad about?

IV. What am I glad about?

## Part B: Journal His Voice

Ask the Father to speak into these areas. Ask to feel his love and affection in these areas. Journal his words, Scripture, or any pictures that come to mind.

Offer a prayer of gratitude for the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love his presense brings in the middle of our humanity.

## Additional Resources

*Honest Advent*, Book and Church Resources, incl. Art Show and Digital Downloads for churches

<https://www.honestadvent.com/church-resources>

'Baby Son,' John Mark McMillan (reflection music)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xy6s1BSD\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xy6s1BSD_4)

'O Come O Come Emmanuel,' Sufjan Stevens (reflection music)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cppww7NoOYM>

Suggested Worship

- Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel
- Silent Night
- Baby Son

RESTORE BRIGHTNESS

*.....Restore  
Brightness  
to my eyes  
Oh Lord....*