

**Advent MMXXII Series Discussion Guides**  
**December 2022**

**Week 1 - There is a Light**

**THERE**  
*Is A*  
**LIGHT.**

**ADVENT MMXXII**  
**CHURCH OF THE CITY NEW YORK**

**Teaching Text**

**John 1:1-14**

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 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. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

## Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Suzy began our Advent series, There is a Light, with a teaching from John 1 about the Light of God coming into the world through the person of Jesus. Light has always been necessary for both life and revelation; in the light there is safety and understanding because things are seen for what they are, whereas the darkness is dangerous and disorienting. The scriptures tell us that the Lord is the God of Light: He wraps Himself in light, His body is like glowing fire, and in the beginning, when God revealed the light of His presence, creation burst forth. When sin entered the world, God's Light was hidden away, and humanity has been trying to get out of darkness ever since. However, despite scientific advancement, developing political systems, and new ideologies, we are unable to bring true light into darkness.

Yet God determined to reveal Himself to His people again, and in the first eucatastrophe (coined by J.R.R. Tolkien, meaning a massive turn in fortune from a seemingly unconquerable situation) He came to dwell with the Israelites as a pillar of cloud and fire. The Light of His presence resided in the temple in Jerusalem until Israel, led astray by other gods, was sent into exile, and God withdrew His presence once more. Years later, a second, greater, eucatastrophe occurred when the Spirit of God hovered over Mary's dark womb, and brought forth Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Light of the World.

By presenting Jesus as the Light from creation and the Light from the wilderness, John's gospel proclaims Him as the source of life and light, the revelation of God's grace and truth, the authority over darkness, and the embodiment of Light. Jesus has overcome all darkness, but we must receive Him as the Light in the beginning, the Light of the World, and that He will be the Light of His people in the age to come. When we believe and receive Jesus' Light, we are freed from having to illuminate ourselves, given the ability to wholly live in His presence, and called to be witnesses to His Light for all the world to see.

## Discussion Questions

### Connect

1. What Christmas tradition are you most looking forward to this year?
2. What is your favorite Christmas hymn?

### Character

Read John 1:1-14 together. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stuck out to you?

2. What truth about Jesus in this passage challenges or encourages you?

### **Consider**

1. Take a moment to consider your own story. Have you experienced an eucatastrophe (coined by J.R.R. Tolkien, meaning a massive turn in fortune from a seemingly unconquerable situation)? How did it change your circumstances?

2. Jesus, the embodiment of Light, came near to give life, bring revelation, and overcome darkness. What area of your life do you need Jesus' transformative Light to break in?

3. Pastor Suzy presented three responses to her message about the Light of Jesus: To receive His light and become a Child of God, to live in the Light of His presence, and to be a witness to His Light for the world. Which one of these responses has been on your heart this week? Is there anything getting in the way of your response?

### **Cover**

Share the areas where you need to have hope restored this Advent season. Pray together that Jesus' Light would pour into these spaces/relationships and stir new hope in your hearts.

## Week 2 - There is a Darkness

# THERE *Is A* DARKNESS.

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### Teaching Text

#### John 3 : 16-21

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”*

### Recap

This Sunday Pastor Jon Tyson continued our Advent series with a teaching from John 3:16-21 about the darkness that exists within the world and within us. There is a deep pain and insufficiency to the shallow “Happy Holidays” we extend endlessly during the Christmas season, because our culture does not have the tools to process the darkness we experience throughout the year. We are in need of an honest diagnosis of the brokenness at the heart of the human condition, or we will only continue to bandage our symptoms without ever fully

being healed. We do not have the strength, understanding, or power within us to fix ourselves.

The verdict Jesus levels against us in this passage is hard, but ultimately loving: light has come into the world, but humanity loves darkness rather than light because our works are evil. Believing the human heart is good and will do right given the chance causes us to live in an inaccurate construct. Jesus, friend of sinners, tells us that our hearts are much worse than we think. It is from the overflow of His mercy and His desire to set us free that He tells us the truth about our condition— we need a true savior.

Our solution is simple: to believe. Jesus declares that He is the Light of the World, and that those who follow Him will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. When God saw His beloved creation walking waywardly, He gave His Son to bring us back to the path of light. Advent makes room for us to face the darkness Jesus rescues us from, and invites us to ask Him to lead us into the freedom of His marvelous light forever. It is out of this truth that we can offer a “Merry Christmas” out of a place of deep joy to everyone we meet, knowing that our darkness has been conquered by His light.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. As we wind down this calendar year together, what is one word you would use to describe your past year?

### **Character**

Read John 3:16-21 together. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stuck out to you?
2. What does this passage reveal about light and darkness? What does it reveal about humanity and Jesus?

### **Consider**

1. Fleming Rutledge says Advent begins in the dark and ends in the Light, but we should not rush too quickly through it. What does it look like to practice this sort of “in between-ness” during Advent?
2. Pastor Jon mentioned that it's better to diagnose sin as sin. Can you think of a time in which you've received a truth that may have felt harsh but it was done in love?

3. Sin is not just doing "bad things," but ignoring God in the world He made and living without reference to Him. What would it look like to live differently than this? How can we acknowledge God in the world?

4. What did you think of Pastor Jon's distinction between "Happy Holidays" and "Merry Christmas"?

### **Cover**

Spend time asking God for the grace to see Him beyond the darkness in this world, and praise Him that His light has already overcome evil. Then, cover personal prayer requests. If you feel led, ask if anyone in your group finds the Christmas season particularly challenging and cover them specifically.

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## Week 3 - There is a Way

# THERE *Is A* WAY.

### Teaching Text

#### John 14:1-10

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”*

### Recap

This Sunday Pastor Jon Tyson continued our Advent series with a teaching from John 14:1-10 about Jesus coming to make a way out of darkness for us. The human story is marked by the deep knowing that we are lost and we cannot find our way to where we need

to be on our own. We are stuck in a culture that dismisses absolute truth, and leaves us slowly moving towards death, unable to know who to trust. However, Jesus came to be the way, the truth, and the life for His People. Jesus is the only one who has looked at mankind and declared that we are worse than we think, but also worth more than we can imagine. It is through His first advent that we see the mission of God to come and get humanity and lead us back to Himself. Life with Jesus provides wonder, truth, love, and permanence, and in Him we find our origins, meaning, morality, and destiny. So we need Christmas, because despite all of the evil in the world and ourselves, Jesus gives us a way when we are lost, truth in a world of lies, and life in a world of death.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. What is your favorite Christmas movie?

### **Character**

Read John 14:1-10 together. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stuck out to you?
2. What does this passage reveal about the mission of Jesus in coming to earth?

### **Consider**

1. What does the joy of the Lord look like/mean to you? What area of your life do you need the joy of the Lord to come in this Christmas?
2. How have you encountered Jesus in a new way(s) through group this season?
3. What is something you want to carry you with you from this season into the next? What is something you want to leave behind?

### **Cover**

Spend time thanking God for His movement in your Community Group during this season. Ask for His rest to permeate the upcoming break, and meet each person individually while you are not gathering regularly.



# LESSONS *And* CAROLS.

## Teaching Text

### Luke 2:22-40

*When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."*

*The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too. There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four."*

*She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.*

## **Recap**

This Sunday, we celebrated the birth of Jesus with our annual Lessons & Carols service, an ancient church tradition of proclaiming the story of Jesus' first Advent through hymns and the reading of Scripture. We journeyed through many of the stories and prophecies leading up to Jesus's birth until we came to the story of His dedication at the temple in Jerusalem. There, Pastor Jon directed our attention to a man named Simeon, who because of his great hunger for the salvation of Israel, saw the secret of the Kingdom of Heaven come to earth while everyone else missed out.

Through Simeon, Pastor Jon called on us to look beyond our everyday preoccupations and reach for the greater promises of God. It's so easy for us to shut out the work of God, and miss what He is doing in our lives. We are too easily satisfied with our small schedules and smaller concerns to see the work that God is doing as He is doing it. Simeon lifted his eyes above his own personal concerns, allowing him to hear the call of the Holy Spirit, and recognize Jesus as the way of God's rescue.

The songs and stories of Christmas that we know so well have toppled kingdoms, delivered people, and transformed history. However, it's so easy for us to hear them year after year, and yet still miss the things that God is doing in our midst. Jesus's entry into our world was startling, and scary, and real. God came to claim you as His own. His whole Kingdom is based on the things that go unnoticed by most. People who are not famous, who do not have power, and who are not wealthy. He does things we don't expect, and will squash our small concerns for His greater concerns. As His people, we must be hungry for the hope and glory Christmas holds for the world, and celebrate Jesus' coming with wonder and amazement.