



Waiting for the *Light*

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH *of* NORTH HOLLYWOOD
2013 ELDER MEDITATIONS

Waiting
for the *Light*

*This collection of Advent Meditations
is a gift to you from the Elders of*

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
of NORTH HOLLYWOOD

introduction

PASTOR BOB BOCK, SENIOR MINISTER

Dear Family and Friends,

On this first day of Advent it is a pleasure to present to you the 2013 “Elder’s Advent Meditation Booklet”. The Elders of our church family have prepared meditation booklets for the seasons of Lent and Advent for over twenty years. These booklets have become cherished in the lives of those who use them daily during these two Holy Seasons.

The theme of this year’s booklet is “Waiting for the Light”. Each Elder has taken that theme and applied it to his or her own life and spiritual journey. What you will read in this booklet is the amazing insights that our lay spiritual leaders bring to our church family. I’m sure you will find that the meditations not only spark your imagination but also bring a new insight to your observance of Advent.

Special thanks this year go to Alexandra Kent who served as the point person for the Elders, edited the meditations as they were submitted and made sure all meditations were submitted in time for publication. Special thanks also go to our graphic artist Terri Burton for her creative treatment of the booklet. And a final thanks to every Elder who took this theme, meditated upon it, mulled it over and have given us the best insight possible into how we ... “wait for the light”.

May the light of the Christ Child fill your lives this Advent Season. Please check the church website or our Advent brochure and join us for regular worship, the Children’s Pageant, the Chancel Choir’s Christmas Concert and for our two lovely Christmas Eve services. Bring your family, bring your friends and bring yourself. We will look forward to seeing you during the Season.

Merry Christmas and may your New Year be the Happiest ever.

1 December 2013

BRETT ELLIOTT

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

– Luke 2:10-12

A displaced, unmarried couple. A second-rate shelter. Low and mean attire. A feeding trough for a cradle.

These are the signs, the shepherds are told, by which they will know their Savior. Signs of distress. Signs of squalor.

Looking for the Christ? Don't look for Him in palaces or mansions. Don't look for adoring throngs or celebration. Don't look for comfort or for plenty. You won't find Him there.

Christ always seeks the straw of the most desolate cribs to make His Bethlehem.

– Thomas Merton

Our Savior makes His entry into our world at those places and times that the world itself tends to overlook: the humble places, the barren places. The places of suffering and of stillness. The places of emptiness and silence.

I often struggle to see the Christ in this season of bustle, festivities, and excess. Distractions and sorrows, stress and grief cloud the spirit and dim the light. But in those desolate cribs Christ makes His Bethlehem. This Advent, I'll look for Him in the moments of quiet and of simplicity. Those moments can be hard to come by this time of year, but I'll seek them out. And I'll look for Him in the moments of sorrow and of isolation, when the trappings of ego are stripped away, and I am bare.

Waiting for the Light? Seek Him in the shadows. He's there.

2 December 2013

ALEX YOUNG

As a mom to two young children, the joy and wonder of Christmas is evident each and every day of the Advent Season. The pure, unrestrained anticipation and excitement! Everything from decorating the house, to choosing our tree from the Tree Lot, is just full of happiness and ear-to-ear smiles.

My children absolutely love—to the point of obsession perhaps—driving through a neighborhood near ours where every house goes all out for the holidays with lights galore and animatronic reindeer and all sorts of chaotic cheer. Last year we visited almost every other night—slowly driving around the blocks, with Christmas carols on the stereo (via our iPhone), sipping Chai lattes from the oh-so-convenient drive-thru Starbucks on the way... but it's that simple event, filled with togetherness, that my children remember. Not the hundreds of dollars spent on toys, or hours spent at the mall gathering holiday necessities. They associate Christmas with evenings spent with my husband and I, singing songs and pointing out silly blow-up Charlie Browns and baby dolls in mangers. That makes me so happy as a parent.

It also reminds me that the Christmas season is about connections—personal, sincere connections. With family. With friends. With co-workers and those ahead of you in lines at stores. The joy and wonder and anticipation is only meaningful because of sharing time, kindness and love with those around you. A reflection of the love and kindness that God has for each of us.

God bless each and every one of you. Be a light to those around you—show kindness and love whenever possible. And merry, merry Christmas.

3 December 2013

JOSÉ PRETLOW

My hometown is Norfolk, Virginia. It's a naval town. During the Christmas holidays, the population grows exponentially up or down depending on the naval vessels that get to come home to port or those that don't. In Church Services during the holidays, you can see the joy on the faces of the families in the pews whose loved ones got to make the trip home and the down cast eyes of the ones whose love ones didn't.

As I'm strolling thru the malls looking for last minutes gifts, it's not uncommon for naval jets to scream and roar overhead, reminding me that all is not at peace even during this season when our world is so war torn. They also remind me, there are not presents under trees for many of our military parents, kids who don't get to come home.

I would give up my seat on any airplane, any car, any bus if it meant it would be a trip home for any of them, but unfortunately it doesn't work that way, so I always remember to do one thing I can always do for them: I pray. I pray for their families, I pray for their safety and most of all I pray for change. I pray for peace in a world that always seems to be fighting. I pray for a silence to the guns, so that these men and women can hold their families and loved ones and rest without the worry of war, distance or fear. I pray the arms of our almighty God holds them close this holiday and I hope that no matter how far away they are, God still shows them His light.

4 December 2013

ADRIAN SPINKS

Waiting For The Light... "WOW"! Let me start off this Meditation with Praising God for allowing me through His loving Grace to be patient enough to wait for the light that would free me from the darkness.

I sat down and really thought about this theme and what came to my heart is that I have been waiting for the light for 43 years of my life; you see, it took that long of living in darkness for me to accept the light that God had waiting for me. I think of all the stuff I have been through: the streets, the gang affiliation, the drugs and the prisons and what comes to mind is how I had to go through all of that to accept the light God had in store for me. How many times have I sat in a house where there was just so much insanity going on: seven kids living seven different ways and never sharing a moment of love, or being in the street gang life that only led from one prison to the next and just wanting for all of this to end, whether it be by death or insanity. Then when you feel you are at the end of your road, you accept Jesus as your Savior and that is when you are filled with the Holy Spirit and the light you have been waiting for comes on and you shine with a spirit of love.

Once I was asked to lecture in college in a criminal justice class and I spoke with the light of Jesus that shines in my spirit and heart. I shared a special moment with a young girl who was crying, as I spoke about all the stuff I have been through. At the end, she raised her hand and asked if I had to do it all over again would I do it different. I wanted to say yes, but my heart said no because I would not be the man of God I am today. She thanked me and said her father is in prison and she had given up, but now she knows there is hope and she will write him with love.

You see, waiting for the light in life continues to help me touch other's spirit with love and that is what Matthew 4:16 says to me: God will produce a light that cannot be touched by darkness and for that I will continue to wait for the light because when the light comes on, everyone keeps their eyes on how you shine.

5 December 2013

JANET BRUCE

*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.— John 1:5*

As a child, my favorite Christmas “decoration” was our manger scene. Its flat, cardboard pieces weren’t as elegant as the one I now have, but I loved it, and I took seriously my responsibility for setting it out. Carefully, I placed the background hills, assembled the stable, and moved the brightly colored figures one by one to their proper places in the tableau. The shepherds, animals, Wise Men, angel, and Holy Family were old friends who made real the Christmas story I knew well from Sunday School. My favorite piece was the star—a bright yellow one complete with “radiant beams.” Having lighted the way in the darkness to that transforming place, it now filled much of the stable roof.

Years later, my mother gave me my own manger scene. The white porcelain figures are beautiful in their simplicity, but leave only to my imagination the stable and its illuminating star. Still, they mean much to me, both for the story they tell and because they were given to me in love.

For several years, both manger scenes were in storage, until last Christmas when I finally unearthed their boxes and again set them out to enjoy. I arranged the porcelain figures first, and once more marveled at their elegant simplicity. Setting up the cardboard pieces however, all of my childhood memories flooded back as I again assembled the stable and greeted my old friends.

It was placing the star that really made me stop and think—that single point of light, guiding the way through the darkness to an infant child. Guiding us to life in Him.

6 December 2013

REV. LOUISE SLOAN GOBEN

Waiting for the Light

As the Advent and Christmas seasons approach, I'm never quite sure who is the grown-up and who the child in our household. I'm talking about me here! As our oldest son Chris was about to experience his first Christmas, I remember that one of his first words was "light!" as he began to notice the appearance of the decorations that adorned the houses of many in our neighborhood.

We would drive down the street as Chris shouted, "Yights! Yights!" from the back seat of the car. (Apparently he couldn't pronounce the "Ls" yet.) And we would reward him by taking him out and showing him more "yights," as much for our own joy as for his.

As much as I still enjoy the lights, I have come to understand how important for us to pay attention to the dark. The darkness brings rest and healing; it offers cooling and refreshment; it allows seeds to lay fallow in the earth until the spring comes and brings renewal. And while it is sometimes difficult to see in the darkness, we are never without some light, even if just the flicker of a candle, or the steady burn of the night light. In times of worry or confusion, pay attention to the dark, and you will begin to notice the simple rays of hope, or the tender moments of peace.

We wait upon the light in readiness for it to emerge, our sense of expectation building.

We wait for God's timing. We wait for dusk, that the tiny Christmas lights might illuminate our delight. For in the harsh light of day, their luminescence is all but invisible.

The Gospel of John calls Jesus, "the true light, which enlightens everyone..." This is the light for whom John the Baptist came to bear witness, so that the world might believe in the power of the grace and love of God.

Notice the hope that fills our waiting.

Pay attention to the darkness, for it brings its own joy.

7 December 2013

PATSY MEYER KREITLER

Waiting can be difficult.
Waiting in line or at a light.
Waiting for test results.
Waiting for a miracle.
Waiting for God to bring your marriage partner.
Waiting to get pregnant.
Waiting for a raise.
Waiting for a friend to call.
Waiting to be healed.

Some of this waiting is the difficult kind, depleting our patience, time and resources. But there is a promise in Scripture for those who wait: *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*— Isaiah 40:31.

Waiting can also be exciting and anticipatory!
Waiting for a visit to or from family far away.
Waiting for a special date with someone you love.
Waiting for a planned vacation.
Waiting for your grown children to come home for the holidays.
Waiting in line to see Santa.
Waiting to get married.
Waiting for a special birthday celebration.
Waiting for a baby to be born.

In these instances of “waiting”, we anticipate the excitement, joy and peace we will feel.

However, in all different kinds of waiting, Christ tells us to wait for Him. He is the focus of our waiting. During this season of Advent, we wait with anticipation to celebrate the birth of Jesus. He will shine His loving light into a world of darkness. Wait patiently for Jesus, the promise of joy, peace and hope in all things.

8 December 2013

MOLLY WILSON

*O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect Light.*

—“We Three Kings” by John Henry Hopkins, Jr.

Advent is a time of great anticipation. As children, we awaited the arrival of our presents on Christmas morning, but as adults we await something different. We still have that swell of excitement in our hearts, but now we look forward to the arrival of the scripture made flesh, the perfect light of Christ come down to earth. In the first chapter of John, Jesus comes into the world to bear the light of God to all. As Christians, Advent is a reminder that Jesus’ legacy of light shines through us.

However, in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, it is all too easy to get bogged down and lose sight of the light. So, as we venture out into the holiday chaos, we must remember our duty to spread Christ’s light. Smile at the grumpy fellow shopper, let that car merge in front of you on the freeway, offer a word of kindness to someone who looks like they need it. In these times, let us turn our eyes to the sky and search for that star over Bethlehem, and lead everyone we encounter Westward to His perfect light.

9 December 2013

MICHAEL LEVER

The Lord's Light Within

*Lord, we reflect with thankful hearts
On the wonder of your birth
The love you expressed when you left
Your glory to come to earth*

*For your life was like a beacon, Lord
Shining brightly in the night
Filling the world with the radiance of
The Father's glorious light*

*And we, too, long to have inside
Your light for others to see
The beautiful reflection of your grace
And the wonder of your majesty*

*For as your life indwells our hearts,
We can shine wherever we are
And arise to take hold of each new day
With your light ablaze in our hearts*

*So rekindle the flame within us, Lord
So it will not flicker nor dim
Ignite us with the light of your love,
So you will shine brightly within*

10 December 2013

MARLA FAIN

I didn't have to travel far, it wasn't especially cold and there were city lights all around. The building wasn't a stable and the locale sure wasn't Bethlehem.

It was the first time I attended the candlelight Christmas Eve service at FCCNH. I was in the sanctuary, sitting two-thirds of the way back on the left side. The service began and the choir came marching in from the Narthex singing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." At that moment, while joyously singing along, I felt God's presence. He was right there with me—with us, celebrating the birth of his son. The feeling was so overwhelmingly powerful I could barely stay standing. I certainly couldn't sing anymore because I was practically weeping. The wait was over. The Light of Christ was in our sanctuary and in my soul that very moment. I will never forget the feeling, and yet it's hard to explain. It's as if I was infused with light and love. To this day I can't sing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" without tearing up and getting a catch in my throat.

Our theme this Advent season is Waiting for the Light. I say why wait? The Angels, the Shepherds and the Wise Men had to wait. We don't. We know what happened that December night so long ago. The trouble is, we get caught up in our routines and then we seem to think it's only December when the Light of the World appears. Not so. He is with us always; we just have to open our hearts to receive him. Go out, seek the Light, and then joyously share God's gift with others.

May each one of you experience joy and love of Christ this Advent season and always.

11 December 2013

JAY ALDRICH



*I've seen it—
Have you?*



12 December 2013

JULIE HOULIHAN

I am waiting at this very moment; waiting for eight thirteen-year old boys to come out of The Mummy ride at Universal. It is a happy wait. I know they are excited to be here and to be together. I have bottles of water ready, and they will quench their thirst and be off to the Simpsons Ride, while I brave the line at Doc Brown's for chicken and fries to feed their always-hungry bodies. I'm not always such an awesome Mom, but it's Jack's 13th birthday, and I want it to be special.

I am expectant and joyful. I prepare for happy times and they come. This is not a stressful type of waiting, like sitting in traffic, waiting for medical test results, or the transformation of a troubled loved one, when we don't know the outcome and feel helpless to affect it. We can only wait, hope, pray. But even a negative outcome does not guarantee unhappiness. One study showed that lottery winners and amputees showed the same level of happiness after one year. How could this be? While most scientists agree that happiness level is 50% genetic, there are other factors that play into a person's happiness, like exercise, prayer, meditation and gratitude. An even bigger influence is social interaction. They found that even when introverts "faked" a smile, they felt better, and when they forced themselves to interact with people, they "projected" happiness and actually became happier.

As we anticipate the birthday of Jesus, we can feel joyful. Not only do we know the outcome, we know the whole story. The Light of the world will be born, He will teach us how to live, and will continue to live within us even after He dies. And when prayer and gratitude isn't enough, seek out friends and family, come to church, volunteer. Bask in the light of others, and stoke your own embers, knowing the outcome of eternal life.

13 December 2013

CRAIG BROOKS

Waiting for the light. The phrase makes me think of being stuck at a red light behind a row of cars. It's easy to become impatient at a time like that. Waiting for the light is never an easy thing to do. I hate waiting. I'm the guy at the elevator who pushes the button an extra couple of times as if it could make it come just a little faster. As a child I couldn't wait for Christmas. I would start getting excited right after Halloween. I'd go through the Sears catalog and make my list for Santa and count the days until Christmas morning. I still can't wait for Christmas but my reasons have changed. It's a time of year that's extremely busy and stressful but for some strange reason amidst all the hustle and bustle I find that I'm a little more patient at Christmas. Maybe it's because of the abundant reminders of God's presence. I don't mean the decorations and lights, the reminders I'm talking about are seeing people go out of their way to help others and give of themselves. These are reminders of God's gift of Jesus. I still can't wait for Christmas but I'm not for waiting for presents anymore I'm waiting for "presence." I'm waiting for the light.

14 December 2013

REV. JEFFERSON C. BEEKER

After Bethlehem

Having felt joy, happiness, peace

Do I return to business as usual?

Having felt unconditional love

Do my thoughts still hold resentment?

Having experienced release

Do I once again feel overburdened?

Having entered light

Do I naturally return to my darkness?

Having touched the hem of the garment

Do I let go to grasp my shroud of shame?

Having been washed

Do I once again need cleansing?

The events of Bethlehem cannot be taken lightly,

They cannot go unacknowledged.

The events of Bethlehem change everything

And business as usual can no longer exist.

After Bethlehem

I am transformed

After Bethlehem

I am challenged

After Bethlehem

The Christ Spirit walks with me always

After Bethlehem

I know I am now forever changed.

15 December 2013

KEN WILSON

Not unlike John the Baptist who, according to scripture, was sent by God to bear witness to the light of Christ's love, we Disciples too are asked to do likewise.

John made it his short life's work to bear witness each day in every thought, word and deed. However, God makes no such demands on us. All He asks is that we remember and to spread, in our own way, the good news. I like to look at it as sort of a free will spiritual offering. While some shine brightly and do great works for a great many in the name of God, others quietly illuminate, doing what they can to make a small difference.

At this time of year, there are many small things that can be done to bear witness to that light. No less than three things come immediately to mind right here at the corner of Colfax and Moorpark. You can give a gift to the North Hollywood Interfaith Food Pantry to help feed those less fortunate. You can volunteer at the FCCNH Christmas tree lot where all the profits are given to children's charities. You can buy a gift or make a donation to Operation Santa Claus so that underprivileged children can have a Christmas to remember.

Whether your gift be large or small, shine a little light this Christmas.

16 December 2013

MICHAEL LEVER

*The Christmas spirit
is that hope
which tenaciously clings
to the hearts of the faithful
and announces
in the face
of any Herod the world can produce
and all the doors slammed in our faces
and all the dark nights of our souls
in the face of life-wrenching cancer
in the face of chemical annihilation
in the face of fearful bullying
in the face of “slobber down the cheek” Alzheimer
in the face of body-mangled accidents
in the face of emaciating hunger
in the face of agonizing rape
in the face of humiliating gossip or truth
in the face of “let this cup pass from me”
HOPE tenaciously clings
to the belief
that with God
all things are possible!
And that even now,
unto us
a Child is born!*

This poem is a combined writing of Ann Weems, *Kneeling in Bethlehem*, (in italics) and Ben Bohren, written at the fall Elders Retreat using the theme of Ann’s book.

17 December 2013

CLAIRE MITCHLLL

First, giving honor to God in the most high, Spirit and Holy Ghost.

As we arise each morning and give thanks to God let us remember that without his Grace and Mercy we would not make it through. As humans we often ask the question “Why is this happening to me?” or just plain “why?” It is not for us to ask, but receive and accept that God will take care of us. He may not come through when we want him but believe me he comes through when its time. If you take the time and think about it, sometimes we have to go through trials and tribulations in order for us to believe and have faith in him.

There is a time a place for everyone and everything and through Christ all things are possible. As we get older, and the generation that we grew up in changes and the adults that taught us and showed us the way start to leave, it is at that moment you say “God I love you, God I need you and God I accept you!” Acceptance is a word with a plethora of meanings and understandings. It is like a snowflake in that everyone has a different way of accepting things, especially Christ. But he does not judge or question and that is why he is served in the most high. When we believe, we open up ourselves to so many good things and good people in this world. When we believe, we give the best we have to offer. When we believe, we love everyone unconditionally, without judging, and without anger. When we believe, we forgive those that have hurt us and betrayed us. When we believe, we learn to live and understand ourselves. And lastly, when we believe, we know why God died for our sins and why his mercy is EVER-LASTING!

Believe in me and I will not fail you! Believe in me and I will get you through your storm! Believe in me and I will never forsake you or misguide you! These beliefs are the beliefs that I have in Christ. He is the only one that knows your struggles. He is the only one who knows your story because with Christ all things are possible.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is when Jesus came in different forms and at the end the woman asked, “Lord I prayed and you didn’t answer my prayer or come to my aid.” The Lord replied, “I did, but you passed me by.” I came in the form of that old man you passed on the street; I came in the form of that child that was lost; and I came in form of that lady

17 December 2013—continued

needing water.

So, you see, Christ comes in many shapes, forms, and images, and if we believe in him we know when he is in our presence. The love and the belief of the Lord are strong and it will get stronger as you receive and accept him in your life. Each day we need to take time to give God the glory, the love, the thanks, and the praise. Through experiences I have learned that he accepts any time that you may have for him. There is nothing any greater than “Having a Little Talk with Jesus.” When we talk to him, he listens without judging, he listens with an open mind, heart and soul. And after your talk you feel like a new person who can say out loud: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” As I write these words about Christ and his goodness, I feel so excited and full of life. His goodness and mercy is powerful and everlasting!

Lastly, let me recite one of my favorite scriptures: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

—John 3:16.

18 December 2013

CINDY KALLER

Toward the Light

I would like to share a poem written by Ann Weems:

*Too often our answer to the darkness
is not running toward Bethlehem
but running away
We ought to know by now that we can't see
where we're going in the dark.
Running away is rampant . . .
separation is stylish:
separation from mates, from friends, from self.
Run and tranquilize,
don't talk about it,
avoid.
Run away and join the army
of those who have already run away.
When are we going to learn that Christmas Peace
comes only when we turn and face the darkness?
Only then will we be able to see
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD*

My wish for you is that you can see the LIGHT and let it create your silhouette. For the light of Jesus Christ is always shining behind you. Let it guide you through the Darkness to Christmas Peace.

Many Blessings this Advent Season.

19 December 2013

BARBARA WILES

Growing up in a family of six, the comics section of the Sunday newspaper was greatly anticipated and enjoyed. “Peanuts” always was, and still is, a favorite! Last June, I visited the Charles M. Schulz Museum in Santa Rosa, CA. If you’re ever in that area, I highly recommend stopping by. The walls are filled with many of the nearly eighteen thousand “Peanuts” comic strips Schulz created over the years.

Even with all the visual overload, I still found myself particularly drawn to one comic strip that has only four frames to it:

In frame #1, Linus stands alone, with his back to us, looking up at a totally black sky.

He has not moved in frame #2, but the tiniest speck of light has appeared in the darkness above his head.

In frame #3, Linus continues to silently watch the now-slightly larger speck of light.

In the final frame, the speck of light has transformed into a flared, glowing star, and Linus, who has remained motionless throughout, says a single word, “HI!”

The simplicity of this comic strip reminds me of the Wise Men’s attention to, and recognition of, that special star as they journeyed to pay homage to the newborn king. It also reminds me of my own spiritual journey, and makes me realize how often I don’t stay with that tiny speck of light and have missed the “HI GOD!” moment.

He is our Light!

For it is God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” and who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. —2 Corinthians 4:6.

Merry Christmas and enjoy the Light!

20 December 2013

BILL HAYES

DownDownDown WeGo

*Down, down, down we go
Into the dark of December,
Knowing the Spirit will be here,
Sure that noels will be sung,
Warmed by the fires of Christmas
Mid the frozen sphere of winter.*

*Down, down, down we go
Into the dark of December,
Watching the Christ-Child reborn,
Alleluias shattering the stillness,
Catching glimpses of angelic deeds,
Easing the pains of winter.*

*Down, down, down we go
Into the dark of December,
Forgiving our neighbors their trespasses,
Paying forward on debts of our own,
Connecting the poor disconnected
Unlocking the hard hearts of winter.*

*Down, down, down we go
Into the dark of December,
Hearing the peace of Christ,
Welcoming home the lost,
Dancing to shiny cornets,
Riding the fierce winds of winter.*

*Down, down, down we go
Into the dark of December,*

20 December 2013—continued

*Filled with the journey of life,
Through emptiness undeterred,
Thrilled by the Light among lights,
Painting the dream-snows of winter.*

- Bill Hayes

(Inspired by KNEELING IN BETHLEHEM, by Ann Weems)

21 December 2013

GLENDAMORGAN BROWN

Waiting. We spend much of our lives waiting for something. It's estimated that on average, each of us will spend 8 years of our lifetimes waiting for traffic lights. We wait in doctors' offices, at the DMV, in line for the latest iPhone—the list goes on.

But there's something we don't have to wait for, and that is The Light. The Light of Jesus Christ came down to earth about 2,000 years ago, and has been here ever since. It's not always easy to see that in this dark and corrupted world. We can lose sight of The Light if we focus on what's bad, what's wrong, what's enticing on the "dark side." Sometimes we're like babies playing hide-and-go-seek, who think if they cover their eyes, they're invisible. Even when we turn our heads away, distracted by the glitter of this world, The Light is still there... patient, steadfast, ready to guide us.

We aren't waiting for The Light; The Light is waiting for us.

22 December 2013

MICHAEL LEVER

Christmas Light

*There's a star burning bright.
Giving light to the night.*

*It is a symbol of hope.
For the world to cope.*

*With sorrows or with pain.
Or floods caused by the rain.*

*It brings faith to mankind.
If they reach out to find.*

*Warm embrace for a sin.
Or forgiveness within.*

*A creation in space.
For the whole human race.*

*Giving birth to a man.
Who, for peace, took a stand.*

*He taught lessons so sweet.
We all kneeled at his feet*

*And rejoiced in his care.
For this life he would share.*

*This bright light touched our heart.
Called to us, "Play your part!"*

22 December 2013—continued

*If we all join as one.
His battle can be won.*

*Peace on earth we can find.
Leaving war far behind.*

*And make Christmas today.
What he meant it to say.*

*Peace on earth and good deed.
For all children in need.*

*As his light shines above.
Share his kindness and love.*

*Leave your sorrows and care.
In his hands with prayer.*

23 December 2013

MICHAEL LEVER

Starry Starry Night

Starry, starry night,

Paint the trees with twinkling light.

Tying bows with ribbons bright.

Sing carols on the streets amidst the snow.

Stockings yet to fill,

Deck the halls and window sill.

Make the nog to cut the chill.

But tell me will you ever really know.

Will you understand,

What the babe will come to be.

How He'll suffer for humanity.

How He'll die to set you free.

Are you listening? You may not know how.

Perhaps you'll listen now.

Starry, starry night,

Wise Men bowed on bended knee.

Shepherds left their flocks to see,

The wonder of a Savoir born of light.

Darkness would be gone.

Peace on earth shall greet the dawn.

Angels cried a joyful song.

The Lord of light came down that Christmas night.

Now you'll understand,

What His life will truly be.

How He'll suffer for humanity.

How He'll die to set you free.

Are you listening? You can hear it still.

Perhaps now you always will.

24 December 2013

ANNA SIGALA

Waiting for the Light

These four words “waiting for the light” for me kept bring me back to one word STRENGTH. We are getting close to the Holiday Season, this time of year is not always a joyful time for many. Some have lost loved ones, some have been without jobs or have suffered in some way or another. I have been blessed to have my family around me and steady job but I do realize not everyone has that luxury.

Strength gives us hope and allows us to keep moving forward and with prayers we will all see the light for a brighter tomorrow. My cousin sent me this prayer and I keep it close and for myself it is a reminder I am never alone:

*Lord, I bring to you my burdens
and you know my situation.
You know I cannot make it without you.
Comfort my heart and give me strength,
and help me carry on. Amen*

A Merry Christmas greeting and a smile goes a long way. You never know how it can impact a stranger or how lending a hand can be all they need to have a blessed Holiday.

May all of you have a blessed Holiday Season and keep lifting strength all around us.

25 December 2013

PASTOR BOB BOCK, SENIOR MINISTER

Throughout my childhood and youth, whenever we would decorate the Christmas tree, my Mom and my Grandmother would tell the story of the family Christmas tree when my Mom was a child.

The old English family tradition was for all eight of my Grandmother's siblings and their families to gather on Christmas Eve for dinner. The old farmhouse my Great-Grandfather had built for his family wasn't the biggest in the area, but there was always room for everyone. When he willed it to his children the understanding was that anyone who needed a place to live could make the farm their home.

After dinner my Grandmother's oldest brother Richard left the family and disappeared into the "sitting room". In those old farmhouses there was usually a wraparound front porch with a door entering the living room and the central door entering the "sitting room", which was only used on special occasions, such as to entertain the Preacher or visiting guests from out of town. The rest of the time it was closed—except on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve the tree, which Uncle Richard had cut from a neighboring woods, was set up in the center of the room. While the women cleaned up after dinner the men went off to the tack room of the barn to visit and smoke their cigars. The children played games in the living room next to where Uncle Richard decorated the Christmas tree. At a pre-appointed time everyone gathered in the living room and waited for the French doors into the "sitting room" to open.

When the doors were flung open there stood a seven foot pine tree with silver and gold decorations lit by over 150 three-inch-candles. When my Mom and Grandmother described the sight it was like being there, smelling the aroma of pine, the smoke of so many candles and feeling the warmth of a loving family gathered around.

Everyone circled the tree and sang carols for about fifteen minutes while Uncle Richard stood back watching carefully the flickering of the candles. After the singing ended everyone was given a cup of fresh eggnog, a prayer of thanksgiving was given for the Christ Child and a Christmas toast was made by the oldest family member. Then everyone exited the "sitting

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room”, the doors were shut and Uncle Richard went about the painstaking task of carefully extinguishing and disposing of the candles.

The sitting-room was again open on Christmas Day so everyone could enjoy the Tree, minus the candles. Grandma always likened the wait in the living room on Christmas Eve, just before seeing the tree, as waiting for the light of the Christ Child to come. Waiting was never easy—but in the end always worth the wait.

I’ve never seen a Christmas Tree lit with real, burning candles. But I have seen and felt the Light of Christ many times in the lives of those who have faithfully followed Him. In one way or another we all wait for the Light. My prayer for you would be that on this Christmas Day your waiting will be over and you will see the Light, bright and beautiful, comforting and reassuring, alive and burning within you as real as the candles on our family Tree over one hundred years ago.

Merry Christmas... and may Christ’s Light fill you always.



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