



# EQUIPPER

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Dear bearer of the light of Jesus,

This year, the first Sunday of Advent falls on December 1. As you plan your Advent-themed worship services and outreach events, you might consider highlighting the biblical theme of *light come into darkness*.

In his praise chorus, “Here I Am to Worship,” Chris Tomlin highlights this evocative theme, exalting Jesus as the “light of the world who stepped down into darkness.” These words refer to the miracle of the Incarnation (a primary Advent focus), by which the eternal Son of God took on flesh and in doing so “stepped down” into our world of darkness (sin and death). By his presence with us, he is the “light of the world,” just as Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, prophesied:

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:78-79, NRSV).

Note that the purpose of this light is to illuminate—to make accessible the way into *shalom*, the “peace” of God. Indeed, Jesus is that light, that path and that peace.

Sadly, some Christians proclaim a light from God that overwhelms in its brightness. I was reminded of that as I drove recently through the small town where I live. Standing on the corners of the main intersection were a group of Christians holding placards and shouting slogans proclaiming God’s coming wrath. My granddaughter asked me, “Grandpa, why are those people so angry?” Yes, why would those who presumably know the God of peace think that he wants them to proclaim a message of a God come to condemn and destroy?

The true message of Advent/Christmas is of a Heavenly Father, who loving all people, sent his divine Son to be the light who would lead humanity out of its darkness. Jesus came to us not as a screaming, angry bully, but as a humble, gentle servant. He came to us (and through the Spirit continues to come) so that we might experience the Father’s love and thus feel safe in trusting him to lead us out of the darkness that envelops us, and into the *shalom* of God’s salvation.

My prayer for you and your congregation(s) this Advent is that you will have a fresh encounter with the God who loves you, and that you will be encouraged to join with Jesus during Advent in proclaiming that love to as many as possible. To help you, we’ve referenced on page two of this issue some related resources. I hope you find them helpful.

Wishing you and yours a blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas,

Ted Johnston—*Equipper* editor



## Advent/Christmas worship & outreach resources

Here are several resources that might be helpful in preparing Advent/Christmas themed worship services and outreach events for your congregation(s).

- **GCI *Speaking of Life* video series.** Joseph Tkach announced recently that he is recording a *Speaking of Life* series that will focus on four Advent themes: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. These videos will help audiences better understand who God is, why he came to us and what he brings. You may wish to use them as sermon illustrations, or to play before church or as discussion starters in small groups. The program scripts are now posted at <http://www.gci.org/pastoral/spoladvent> and here is the release date for each video with a link to the video that will work on the release date forward:

  - 11/29/2013 – Hope – [www.gci.org/SpOL345](http://www.gci.org/SpOL345)
  - 12/06/2013 – Peace – [www.gci.org/SpOL346](http://www.gci.org/SpOL346)
  - 12/13/2013 – Joy – [www.gci.org/SpOL347](http://www.gci.org/SpOL347)
  - 12/20/2013 – Love – [www.gci.org/SpOL348](http://www.gci.org/SpOL348)
- **Advent-themed hymn.** If you would like to play a hymn that proclaims the theme of Jesus coming as light into our darkness, you might like *Come Darkness, Come Light* performed by Mary Chapin Carpenter. You'll find it posted on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/2QYdSyPzWGg>
- **Engage with God resources.** The *Engage with God* website is a helpful source for resources related to sermons, worship planning, small groups the like. At <http://engageworship.org/search/theme/christmas> you'll find their resources related to Christmas and Advent. Though we recommend the resources on this website (and the other sites listed on this page), we do not necessarily endorse everything you will find there.
- **Additional resources.** You will find a list of resources for preparing for Advent and the new Christian year at [www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/2011/12/05/why-is-advent-like-learning-to-ride-a-bike/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/2011/12/05/why-is-advent-like-learning-to-ride-a-bike/)
- **Advent-themed communion service.** Here is an idea for organizing a communion service during Advent. It's adapted from the article, "Fresh ideas for a Lord's Supper service" by Diana Davis.

Set up tables of bread and juice across the front of the dimly lit sanctuary. Play soft, worshipful music, and place a large lighted candle, representing Christ, in a square of decorated floral foam near the front—use the Christ candle if you have been using the various Advent candles already. As they enter the sanctuary, give each worshiper a small candle and an instruction sheet, directing each person to be seated alone for a few minutes of silent personal examination and prayer, to read the Scriptural account of the Lord's Supper, and then go alone to a table to partake of the bread and wine/juice. As a commitment to shine for him, each person lights his candle from the Christ candle and places it firmly in the display before leaving silently.
- **Intergenerational nativity celebration.** One pastor invited the households (parents and children) of the congregation to bring to church one Sunday during Advent their own Nativity scenes for all to see. The congregation then celebrated the variety and international diversity of these crèches and the pastor led a devotion that included readings and exercises for families to do and discuss together. Some of the families dressed in costumes of the nativity characters. While so adorned they made photos and videos to send as gifts to relatives and friends.
- **Advent/Christmas sermons.** Looking for some Advent or Christmas sermon ideas? Here are 28: <http://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/dr-ray-pritchard/twenty-eight-christmas-sermons-11596564.html>

