



Good morning everyone,

Welcome to our first devotional in the Season of Advent for 2020, that great point in the Christian calendar where we see the preparations for the celebrations of Christmas rise in pace and fervour as the manic behaviour of so many traditionally increased in terms of party going and present buying and shopping in general. With Covid-19 of course, the year of 2020 has been so different with so many shops closed thus far as a result of the restrictions designed to impede the risk of further infection across the wider community and therefore people are driven to the world wide web for their shopping and the new phenomenon of the "Zoom Night party" where everyone meets up while staying in their own homes. The Prime Minister, Boris Johnstone has said "this is the season to be jolly - but not too jolly!", The first minister of Scotland was cited in the Telegraph newspaper as suggesting that we should all celebrate in a "Social Bubble" limited to three families only this Christmas.

Strangely, I find myself feeling the same thing and asking the same question every year and this Covid-19 ridden year has been no different. The Question of course is a simple one. Is that all Christmas Means to you? Getting presents, buying presents (in some cases spending ridiculously more money than one would spend elsewhere in the year, including going on holiday) Is it just about Family and meeting up, while that is important, in the grand scheme of things, it may be less so. And as for Partying, whether the proverbial office party or the setting of a family gathering or the Zoom night occasion, is that the only thing justifying Christmas? Is Christmas merely an excuse for these things to happen or is it something more?

I am sure you already know what my answer to that will be. Of course, it is more than that. While celebrating the survival of your company at the

end of a particularly hard year is good cause to celebrate, it still pales in significance of what happened that first Christmas. While being able to meet up with family you've not seen either because of distance, work or Covid-19 is a good thing it pales with comparison with what actually happened that first Christmas. While partying at Christmas becomes merely an excuse what would many refer to as simply a "Bevvy Session" for hard drinkers. The ramifications of Christmas are huge, more than we could imagine or believe. The focus of Advent is always to point to that moment in History where God himself physically intervenes in the Course of Humanity which was, as a well-known Church of Scotland minister wrote in one of his well-known Christmas songs, was "for the good of us all".

Perhaps in these Covid-19 times we live in we need to see again the Hope that Christmas offers and the promise that Christmas makes because Jesus, God's only son came into the world. Whatever is going on in life you today - take hope in the real joy that Christmas offers.

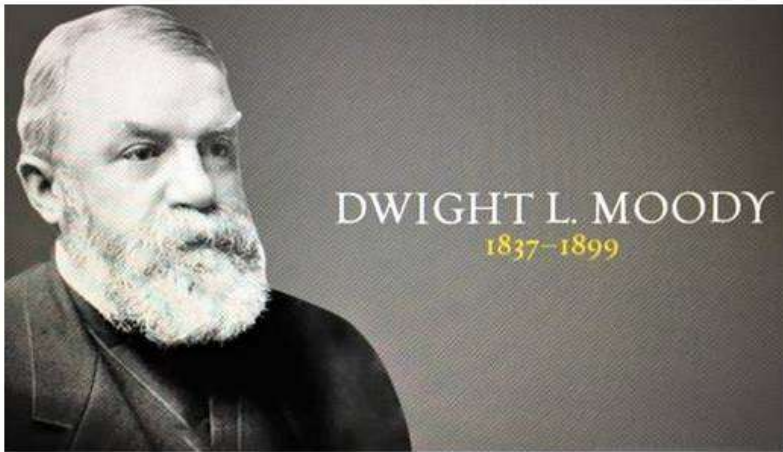
Have a great week staying safe in the process
Calum D. Macdonald



For those who are still on the
Weekly Offering Envelope
Scheme you may want to know
that your box envelope for
2021 is available to be uplifted
from the church Vestibule and
if there are any questions you
may have , please call on Mrs
Margaret Loudon for further
information.
thank You



*The Flowers in Church this
week were donated by Mrs
Senga Macintosh in fond
memory of her husband
Douglas*



“Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure.”

*11 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.
(1 Chronicles 16: 11)*

Let us Pray,

Gracious God and Our Father in Heaven, we gather before in the privacy of our own thoughts and solitude of our own homes at this time to acknowledge your Majesty and Power this day. By your very word the world came into being and through your Word the world is sustained. We cannot imagine the extent of all that you are and all that have done. Your word tells us that such is your knowledge of us that you have the hairs upon our head counted, that while we only see the outward appearance, You see our thoughts and read our hearts. Knowing all that is good about us and knowing all that is bad and shameful, You still love us more than we deserve.

How can we not bring a sense of thankfulness and praise this day?

Father in Heaven, you who have loved us more than we can know at times You have chosen us from the very beginning to be part of your family and We praise You for that.

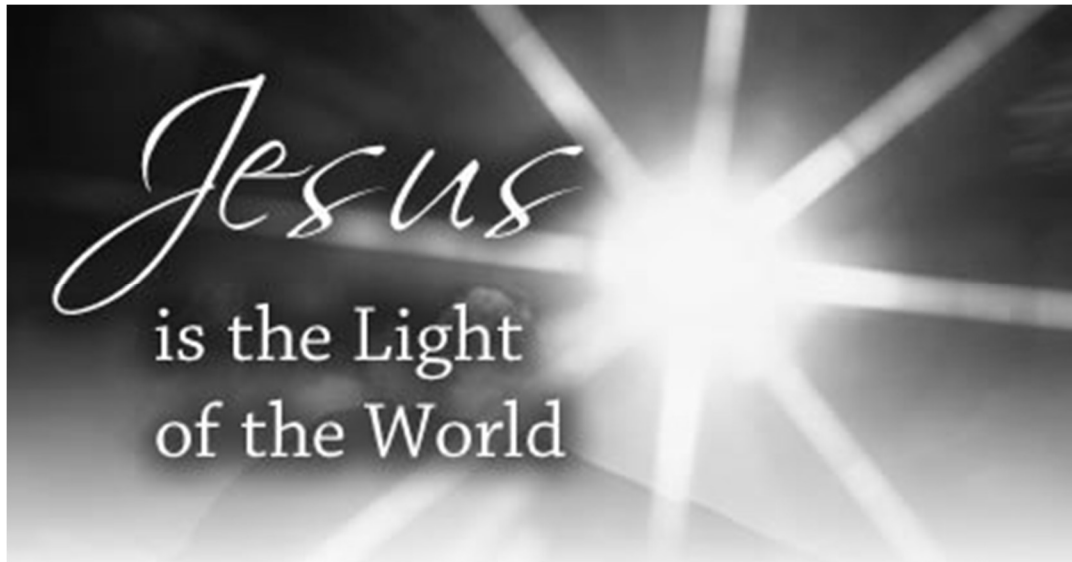
As we draw near to you in this devotional time and as we look once more to the time in the year that we call Advent, we thank you for the Bethlehem Child where Lies the promise of intimacy with our Father in Heaven, for the Saviour who died and even became Sin for each one of us. We thank you for the Empty Tomb that sealed the promise of eternity.

As we seek your forgiveness and seek also your Holiness we pray that through your Spirit's guidance we might live lives that honour You and draw others to You. We pray that in this coming week we might have opportunity to speak of the things faith, the joy of sins forgiven and the hope of eternity with our Loving Heavenly Father - Secured once and for all.

For now be with us in these moment and speak to our hearts, Encourage us with your presence as we dedicate ourselves afresh to your service once more in these the words of our Saviour who said,

**Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done
On earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil:
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever. Amen.**





John 3: 1 – 21

(New International Version)

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

⁴ “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ 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.

Getting Ready for Christmas





Where are the Lamp Lighters?

Good morning,

Welcome to our Devotional this morning. In wondering what to say in this week's Devotional, I was listening to the music of Stuart Townend, one of the UK's foremost Christian songwriters and worship leaders. It was while the music was playing in the background that I was working through

what part of God's Word could possibly help us as we come to the end of November and look towards the Beginning of December and indeed begin to set the Stall for Christmas this year at the beginning of the Advent season which is obviously going to have to be very different from the Christmas celebrations that have gone before.

In that moment of reading the Gospel of John's third Chapter which probably contains the most well-known verse of the New Testament and probably the Bible itself, I suspected that there will have been very few people we know who will have not heard, ***"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"*** (John 3:16)

One of the great theological themes running through the New Testament and indeed the bible itself is that of Lightness and Darkness, a theme particularly strong in John's Gospel, referenced in the final verses of our reading this morning as a case in point. ***"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."*** (Verse 19)

As I was reading this verse, I began looking for a Christmas/Advent illustration I could use. To let you in on a secret about ministers and their preparation for Sunday mornings, they would in the past have had an extensive collection of books with stories and illustrations from other ministers who had used the said illustrations already in sermons of their own. Of course, with the internet such information is even more widely available and you don't even need to buy the books anymore. (The age of Plagiarism has

truly not died.) In searching for such an illustration, I came across this story taken from a journal called Biblical Research Monthly and with your indulgence I will share it with you.

A little girl who was shivering her way along a main street in one of our great cities in the darkness and cold of a winter's evening when she saw the beautiful lights of a church building. Attracted by the lights and hearing the music coming from within, she went in and warmed herself as she listened. The minister's text was, "I am the light of the world." At the close of the service, she went to the minister and said, "Did you say you are the light of the world, sir?" The minister replied, "No, dear child. Christ is the light of the world, and I am one of the lights." The little lass looked at him for a moment, and then solemnly said, "Well, sir, I wish you would come down and hang out in our alley, 'cause it's awful dark down there!"

That wee story struck a chord with me when I read the wee girl asking the minister if he was the light of the world, his reply of course being that he was not but that he was one of the lights. In that moment, a very distant memory as a boy growing up in a tenement flat in Glasgow kicked in. In that moment I suddenly remembered standing in the entrance of the Close and seeing a wee man come into the Close with a short ladder and a key to switch on the lights in the close and his job every day in the morning and in the evening was to go round his district as the Lamp Lighter.

At that moment the song was being sung **"Light of the World, You stepped out into Darkness"** and for some strange reason or maybe not so strange, I was left with the question 'Where are the Lamp lighters today?'

Nicodemus was probably one of the best educated and religiously devout people in the land of Israel at the time he met with Jesus. In the Gospel Account he arranges a secret meeting with Jesus at a time when his colleagues were seeking his downfall and the conversation that he has with Jesus challenges Nicodemus with the cry which every conservative evangelical Christian has cried from Church pulpits and street pulpits alike ever since, "You must be born again!"

It is the last few verses that struck me when Jesus sums up the human condition perfectly by reminding us how we prefer to live in the darkness of sinful living rather than live in the light of God's Holy living. The image at the top of our devotion today is that of a lamp lighter who would go around lighting the street lamps, probably gas lamps in the day. (a wee bit before my time) It's a profession no longer required because of the modern technology of the day in 2020. Here's the thing though. Jesus needs Christian lamp lighters to help him bring the light of his great love to a world in Darkness.

As the ones commissioned by him to follow through his mission of saving the lost and broken, he calls us to be the Lights in a world full of darkness.

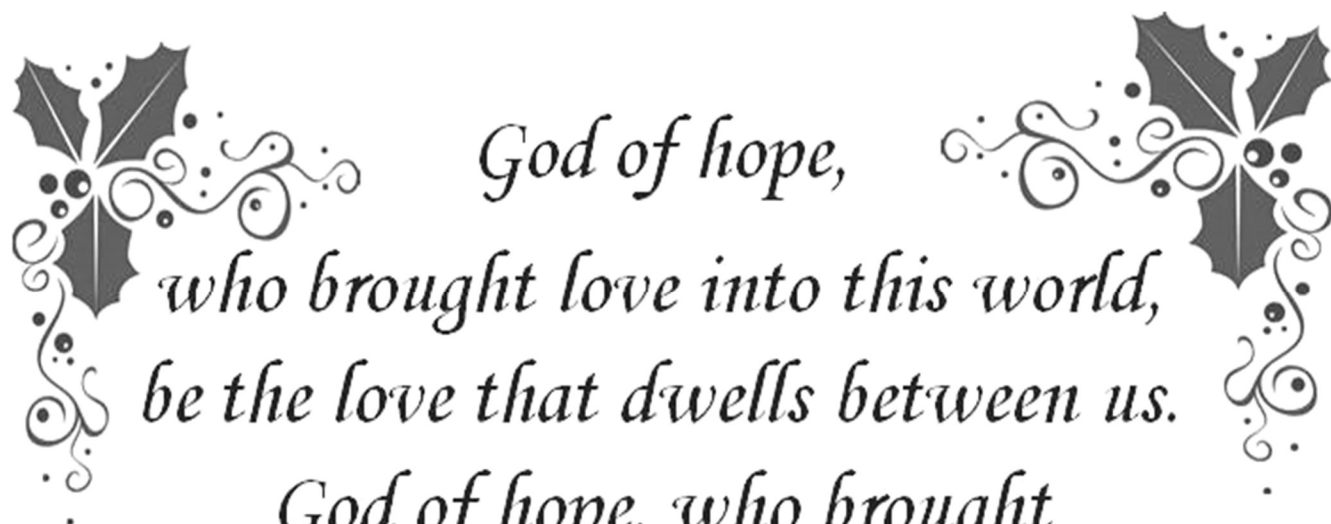
'Where is the mandate for all this?' I hear you say. Clearly it is in the Great Commission of Matthew's Gospel to "go into all the world", comments which are similarly echoed in the other Gospel accounts.

The Advent Season is about reminding everyone that across the centuries, there were those who proclaimed the light of the world would come and indeed had come and promised would come again. The Gospel of John highlights consistently people's need for a Saviour. For all Humanity's so called advancements and developments, the baser negative character traits remain very much alive, our greed and selfishness, our anger and desire for revenge, our petty jealousies and envy. The fruits of God's Spirit, (His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness gentleness and self-control) continue to elude us and it is only by our faith in Jesus we will truly access such fruits that will last.

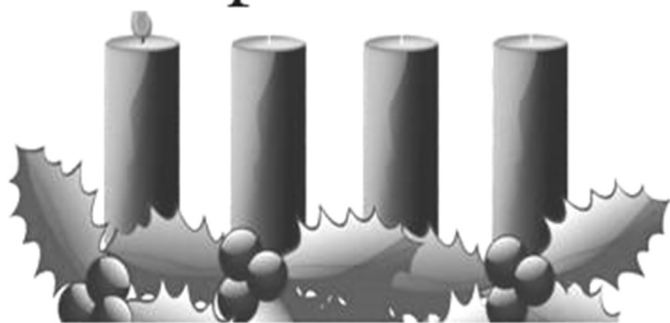
The story of Advent points us to God's gift to a broken world - Jesus Christ, the only one who lived his life without blemish, spot or stain, and who claimed to be God and proved himself thus. When we compare Jesus to all other claimants of every other religion, He is like the poet who said, 'The night has a thousand eyes and the day has but one, The light of the whole world dies with the setting of the sun.' At the midnight of human ignorance, there are a lot of lights in the sky. But at noon time there is only one, and that is Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. It is with Him we should cast our lot, not with Confucius who claimed wisdom, or the one who claimed enlightenment like Buddha, or the one who claimed to be a prophet like Mohammed, but the One who claimed to be God in the flesh...and proved it - Jesus the light of the World, who came that we might have life and have it to the full. Will you be His Lamplighter today?

Have a great week.

Calum



*God of hope,
who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought
peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought
joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells between us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the centre, the focus of our lives
Impart the Blessing of the Father, Son
and Spirit in this Advent time and*



always.

Amen