

Already, but Not Yet

Rev. Tracy Siegman

Senior Pastor, First Christian Church, Covington, KY

NBA Mental Health Initiative Resource Task Team

Advent 2018



John 1: ¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

I begin celebrating Christmas on November 1st. I put up a Christmas tree well before Thanksgiving. I appreciate that satellite radio stations switch to Christmas music after Halloween. I need to start early to enjoy any bit of the season, albeit well before everyone else. My Christmas spirit is high in early November but fades with each day as the day of celebration draws near. As one who copes with seasonal depression, the short days and long nights around Christmas cover me in shadows that seem to not be cast out by the Light of the World. On Christmas Day, I long for the light as I lay under a blanket of darkness.

The prologue to the Gospel of John is a traditional text for Christmas Eve that testifies to the light coming into the world. Its message gives us comfort that God's promises of redemption have been fulfilled in the birth of the Christ child. God has come to us in the flesh of the most vulnerable in the world - a newborn baby. His birth is glorious, warm light coming into a cold, dark world. To mark the remembrance of His birth, we gather in sanctuaries late in the evening and light candles. We sing "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World" and emerge into the darkness with new hope.

John's prologue is a mystery to me. For many it comforts with the fulfillment of hope. I, however, find peace knowing that the Light of the World will cast out the darkness, not on Christmas evening, but when the season changes from Winter to Spring; then, my hope for light in the darkness will be fulfilled.

There is an 'already but not yet' of the Christian faith that is especially evident at Christmas. The world celebrates that Christ has come and acknowledges that Christ is yet to come again. Year after year, I cling to the 'not yet' promise of faith. I find peace knowing that Christ has come into my darkness each Spring and will come again into my darkness this Spring.

Worship Resources

The darkness can feel lonely. It seems everyone else's Christmas spirit is growing while mine is fading. I feel left out of the celebration even in the midst of such joy. The Prince of Peace and the promise of the coming light is my grounding when I have moments of hopelessness. The season is especially difficult as a pastor who feels the pressure to plan a meaningful worship experience for Christmas Eve that will ignite the light within our hearts and make everyone feel like a child again. Thank God I'm a planner and planned a Christmas Eve service in late October. When I'm gathering with my flock on Christmas Eve, all I will have to offer is a calm assurance of the truth we all know: the Christ will come again.

Call to Worship

L: In this season of prophecy, promise, and preparation, we come to be renewed and refreshed.

P: We come to be inspired by stories of a messiah who will change the world and change us.

L: We come to listen for words of hope and joy, promise and challenge.

P: We come with open ears, open minds, and open hearts. We come to receive the blessings God has in store for us in this season of waiting.

L: Come! Let us worship our God - the One who brings all things to fulfillment.

Advent Candle Lighting Litany

Second Sunday - Peace (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

by Martha Spong

<https://marthaspong.com/2013/11/15/advent-wreath-liturgies-narrative-lectionary-year-4/>

Leader: [The poet, Wendell Berry, wrote:](#)

"When despair for the world grows in me...

I come into the peace of wild things

who do not tax their lives with forethought

of grief. I come into the presence of still water."

We think of the 23rd Psalm, "He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." When everything feels hopeless, when we feel as dead as the dry bones in Ezekiel's valley, God calls us away from the workaday world. God calls us to breathe in the holy breath of peace. When we light the candle of Peace, we breathe in the One who restores us.

People: Whatever we face in life, God's Spirit of peace will dwell within us.

Pastoral Prayer (option 1)

God of Shalom, our season of Advent promises to bring us peace. Peace is more than a world order, more than a cease from fighting and bickering. The peace of Shalom is much more. Shalom is peace of mind, people living in harmony, lives made whole through healing, and prosperous people and nations. Lord, this is the peace we pray for this season. We pray for Shalom. Peace is not enough. We want more than just tolerance of one another. We want dialogue and understanding. We want more than getting by. We want all to have enough. We want more than feeling okay. We want to feel safe and secure. We want healing for our broken world. Only then can the harmony of the Garden of Eden be restored and we can live in whole commune with you and one another. Lord, we long for Shalom. May it be so soon. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer (option 2)

Most Holy God, this season of excitement can quickly turn to a season of stress. Our preparations for joyous occasions with family and friends can cause us anxiety about getting all the baking done, getting all the gifts bought, getting all the presents wrapped, getting the house ready for family, and getting all the decorations out. Let us keep our focus stayed on the true meaning of Christmas. Let us ever be mindful of the coming Christ child whom all these festivities celebrate. Forgive us when we allow the things that should bring us joy and point us to you instead draw us toward the sin of envy, pride, and greed. Amen.



***Rev. Tracy Siegman** is the senior pastor of First Christian Church in Covington, Kentucky. She is working to strengthen the church's relationships with their neighbors and forming new partnerships as it seeks to be an integral part of the community. Rev. Siegman grew up in Northeast Ohio. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Management from Walsh University in Canton, Ohio, and a Master of Divinity degree from Lexington Theological Seminary. She has served churches in Illinois, Ohio and Kentucky. Rev.*

Siegman enjoys volunteering at after-school programs and serving on various non-profit boards. She has a passion for outreach ministry and advocacy for social justice.

*Rev. Siegman serves the general church as a member of the Resource Task Team of the **NBA Mental Health Initiative**. With hopes to support the prioritization of mental health and wellness in the life of the church, the Mental Health Initiative aims to establish the necessary awareness and understanding required to counter stigma and change the landscape of conversation regarding mental illness and disorders within the church. Learn more at www.nbacares.org/mental-health.*