

FAITH @ HOME

Week of December 29, 2019

First Sunday after Christmas

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Psalm 148

REFLECT: Every thing praises God! The mountains and hills, the wild animals and all the cattle praise God! Even the frost and snow praise sing like the angels did in celebration of Christ's coming! Be curious with your child of all the things that praise God in these twelve days of Christmas. Notice the flying geese overhead. Pay attention to the tiniest bug and wonder together what kind of song it sings to praise God. Suggest lyrics and tunes that might fit the tree in the front yard or the clouds in the sky.

RESPOND: Make your own music to praise God for Christmas. Continue to emphasize that feeling in their bodies that means God is close and then spend an afternoon crafting some homemade instruments to make your own music to celebrate the good news of Jesus Christ.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ELSA ANDERS COOK



Elsa Anders Cook is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ who has served churches in New York, Maine, Washington, and Pennsylvania. She volunteers at church now while supporting her husband in his service as a Major in the United States Army. Together, they have two little ones. She blogs at cookingwithelsa.org.

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ADULT AND ELEMENTARY

READ: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

REFLECT: Isaiah is one of the longest books in the Bible. It's full of incredible stories of perseverance and miracles and stubbornness and defeat and hope. But the thing it's the most full of is God's love and abiding goodness toward us. No matter how much garbage we do to each other, God is still right there explain to us how to make things right--how to do better and why we ought to do better. Also in Isaiah are these amazing stories about how life will be/can be when we are good to each other, when we remember to love God and our neighbor.

Isaiah is the one who tells us what the Messiah will look like, what to expect from God when things get hard, what to do when we mess up and get it totally wrong. And in today's reading from Isaiah, we hear a song of thanks and praise for all that God has done for us--for saving us and loving us, for teaching us how to love and be loved.

When your wildest dreams come true, when you find out the best news you've ever heard, when you are so happy you can't stop smiling, you want to tell everyone the story of how this wonderful thing happened to you. You want people to know about this good news! Isaiah is singing loud today, thanking God for loving us so much. Find a way to sing along!

RESPOND: Christmas isn't over! Sing some of your favorite Christmas carols around the house this week. SING LOUD!

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: RACHEL JONES



Rachel Jones is the associate editor for Forward Movement. She and her husband live on a farm with a dog, too many cats, several rabbits, and a flock of very opinionated chickens.

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ADULT AND YOUTH

READ: John 1:1-18

REFLECT: I don't know about you, but it's really easy for me to separate things into different camps: black and white, ying and yang, light and darkness. Even harder sometimes is to remember that, at least when it comes to big ideas of light and darkness, the two often times co-exist and live side-by-side. And the reminder that light just keeps on shining its bright and shiny self, right in the middle of the darkest of spaces, is exactly what John reminds us of in today's passage.

So, let's just use our imaginations for a second. Imagine yourself in the darkest of places— perhaps you've gone spelunking hundreds of feet into a cave or maybe you're sitting on the edge of a stage in a pitch-black theater, feet dangling into the orchestra pit. Wherever you find yourself, now imagine if a single light all of the sudden burst onto the scene. One flashlight would show you every corner of the cave! A single candle would illuminate all of the seats in the theater! Friends, this is the light that John saw, the true light which enlightens everyone.

RESPOND: Before you meet together, gather a flashlight or candle for each member of your family. Turn off all of the lights. Close the blinds, or curtains. Extinguish, in other words, any outside light coming into the room. Then, one at a time, perhaps like you did at a Christmas Eve service, bring light into the room. You can let the power of light in darkness speak for itself, or you can consider answering some of the following questions: 1. How does single light change the trajectory of darkness? What happens when two, three, four or more lights are brought into a space? 2. How have you been changed by the light of Christ? How have you seen Christ's light change the world around you?

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: CARA MEREDITH



Cara Meredith is a writer and speaker from Seattle, Washington. Her memoir, *The Color of Life: A White Woman's Journey Toward Love and Justice*, released in 2019 (Zondervan). You can connect with her on her website at <https://www.carameredith.com/>.

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ADULT AND ADULT

READ: John 1:1-18

REFLECT: When I walked into my office this morning, I noticed the office was darker than it had been all summer. I opened the blinds, but that didn't help much. So, I had to turn on the lamp. When I turned on the lamp, my office brightened, and I was able to sit down and get to work. Working in a darkened room isn't conducive to productivity. Working in a darkened world isn't conducive to bearing fruit for the Lord. This reading says the light was coming into the world which would enlighten everyone. That light was Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, Jesus wasn't recognized nor accepted by the people. But for those people who did accept him, he gave them the power to become God's children. Do you realize how powerful that makes you? Since you're now one of God's children, empowered and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, you have the power to shine light into darkness. Are you shining that light? Are you going into the deepest, darkest parts of your sphere of influence and shining your light? You are empowered to do so.

RESPOND: There are many creative ways to shine your light in our darkened world. You can bake some cookies in the shape of a lightbulb. Or, check the bulbs in your home. Are they dim? Change your lightbulbs to something brighter to remind you to let your light shine. Finally, find creative ways to let the light of Christ shine in your workplace. Whenever your coworkers are complaining, shine your light. Whenever your coworkers are gossiping, shine your light. Remember, you are empowered by the Lord to shine God's light because God's light abides within you.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ARETHA L. GRANT



Aretha Grant serves her local church as a Bible teacher and elder. She loves writing and is the author of *Overcomer: 25 Keys to Walking Victoriously*. Aretha resides in Hagerstown, MD with her husband and two youngest children. You can read Aretha's blog at www.arethagrants.com.

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