

ADVENT AT GRACE

Advent Study - *Light of the World* by Amy-Jill Levine

When: Mondays at 8:00 pm starting November 30

Where: Zoom (find the link on our website)

Lead By: Angie Dornisch, Wendy Ochs,
Tyler Amundson (Shiloh)

Advent Retreat - *Joining a Hope that Has Come*

When: Sat., December 12 from 10:00 am - Noon

Where: Zoom (find the link on our website)

Led By: Sarah Clark

Blue Christmas

When: Sunday, December 20 at 7:00 pm

Where: Grace's Facebook page

CHRISTMAS EVE

Outdoor Drive-In Candlelight Service - 6:00 pm

Where: Grace UMC Parking Lot

Online Candlelight Service - 8:30 pm

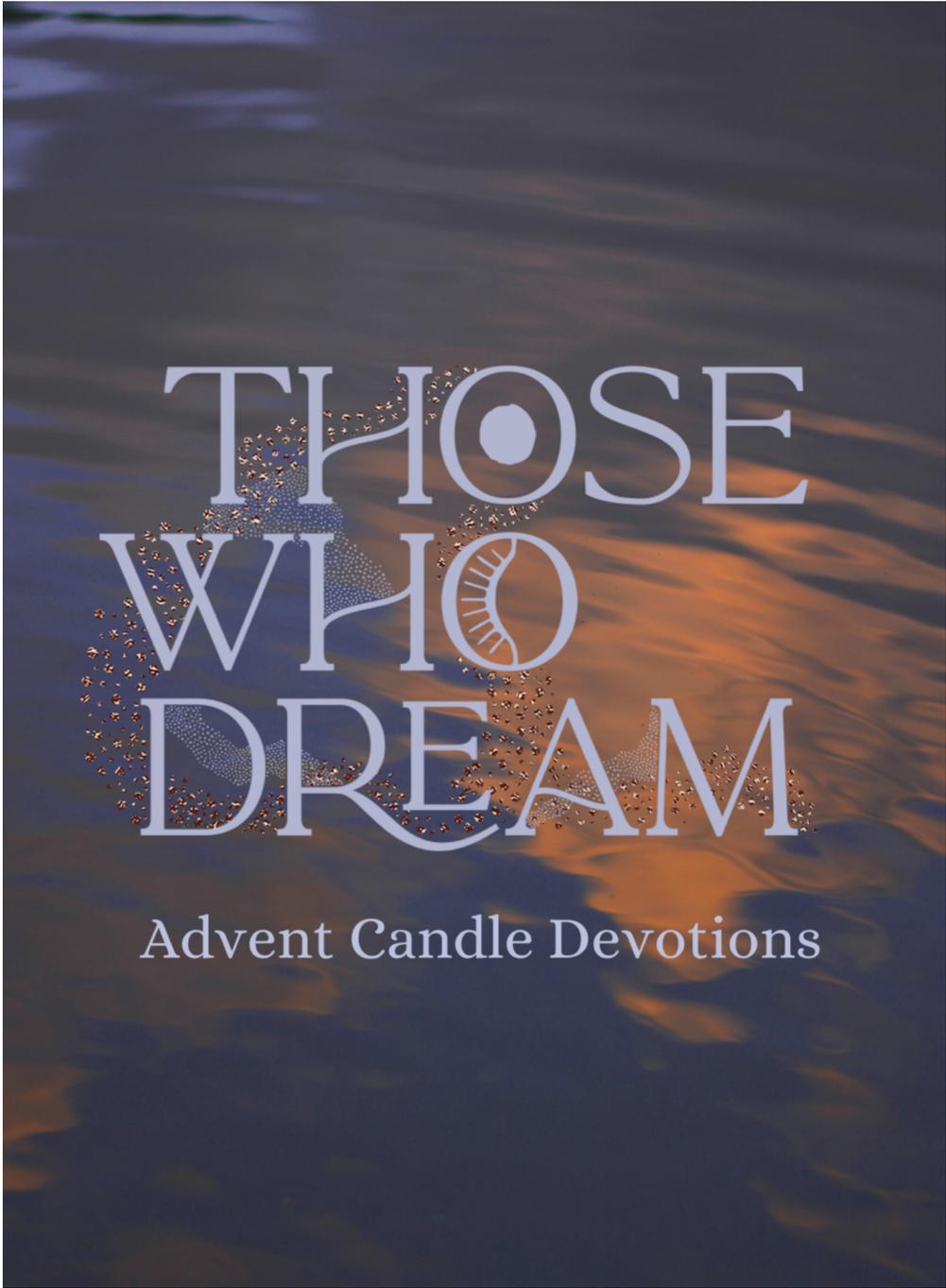
Where: Grace's Facebook page and website

Midnight Vigil - 11:30 pm

Where: Zoom (find the link on our website)

graceumcbillings.org/christmas

GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



THOSE
WHO
DREAM

Advent Candle Devotions

graceumcbillings.org

Peace, My Brother.
Peace, My Sister.
Peace, My Soul.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Think about, journal, or discuss around the table:

What is a line, an idea, or a feeling that stands out for you from the scripture or the poem? Why?

What dreams do you carry with you to the manger this night? How does remembering Christ's birth into the world give hope to your dreams?

CLOSING

*Read **Isaiah 9:2-7** as a closing prayer.*

A SANCTIFIED ART

A Sanctified Art is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.
The word is Peace.
It is loud now. It is louder.
Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.
It is what we have hungered for.
Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.
Security for our beloveds and their beloved.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.
We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come.
Peace.
Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.
We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian,
Implore you, to stay a while with us.
So we may learn by your shimmering light
How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.

On this platform of peace, we can create a language
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.
At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ
Into the great religions of the world.
We jubilate the precious advent of trust.
We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices
To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortals, Believers and Non-Believers,
Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.
Peace.
We look at our world and speak the word aloud.
Peace.
We look at each other, then into ourselves
And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Psalm 126 opens with the line: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream." What does it look like to live as those who dream? How can we embody and bring forth God's dreams? How do we dream of a better world when our current one feels harrowing and disappointing?

The prophets, the psalmists, John the Baptist, Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, the shepherds - they were all dreamers. They received, discovered, and responded to God's dreams for the world. In Advent, we step into the mystery and awe of God's dreams and pray they shape our reality.

Rituals and traditions are especially strong during this season. One tradition that was particularly poignant in my family as I grew up, was the ritual of lighting the Advent candles each Sunday night for the weeks leading up to Christmas and on Christmas Eve. This year, with so much going on in the world, the opportunity to pause, connect with God and one another, and reflect on the dreams we have, the dreams we've put on hold, and the ways God is dreaming among us even now, is especially important. This guide offers scripture, a candle-lighting prayer, and a poetic reflection for each week.

The reflections can be done together with others or on your own. You can set aside time in your household each week to reflect together, or call a friend. Or join me on Sundays at 5:00 pm on Zoom as together we light our Advent candles, reflect on the scripture, and pray. You can find the Zoom link at graceumcbillings.org/christmas

May this be a season of dreaming, seeking, and sowing God's love in our world.

Grace and Peace,



Rev. Sarah Clark

THOSE WHO *keep awake* DREAM

1st Sunday in Advent

OPENING WORDS

Those who dream do not fall asleep to the realities of the world. God prompts us to pay attention to where God's dreams for change and new life are emerging. In Advent, we remember that God's ultimate dream is to be intimately connected to us - to come down and dwell among us.

LIGHT THE FIRST CANDLE

One person can read the prayer or multiple people can take turns each reading a line.

I dream of sunflower fields.
I dream of key lime pie with a mile-high meringue.
I dream of the days when we could see our friends.
I dream of snow days.
I dream of empty beds in jail cells.
I dream of a world that will let kids be kids.
I dream of full tables instead of empty bellies.
I dream of schools with enough money to teach.
I dream of parents with enough money to feed.
I dream to keep awake, because if we don't dream of better days,
then we might forget that this is not what God imagined.
So today we light the candle of hope, for hope is the very thing
that keeps dreams afloat.

Light candle.

May this light be an invitation to keep awake.
May this light be our invitation to be Advent people -
people who dream.
Amen.

Tonight, we dream of a God who draws near to us out of
unfailing love.

Light candle.

May this candle be a reminder that there will be a day when every
dream will be fulfilled.
And until then, we will be those who dream.
Amen.

READ

Read **Luke 2:1-20**, then read the following poem:

Amazing Peace by Maya Angelou
Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses
Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.
Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lighting sleeps quietly in the corner.
Flood waters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things.
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corners.

this night, we are
**THOSE WHO
DREAM**
christmas eve

OPENING WORDS

The Christmas story reminds us that we are all dreamers. Like those gathered around the manger, we come to this night each year with awe, wonder, and holy imagination for what is possible. Like Mary, we treasure God's dream in our hearts and commit to keeping it alive. Like the holy family, we believe and trust in a God who comes to us in the vulnerability of a child.

LIGHT THE CHRIST CANDLE

Begin by lighting the first, second, third, and fourth candles. Then, one person can read the prayer or multiple people can take turns each reading a line.

In the beginning, God dreamed of a beautiful world.
In Egypt, the Israelites dreamed of freedom.
In the wilderness, the people dreamed of safety.
In Jerusalem, the people dreamed of a Messiah.
In Bethlehem, the shepherds and Wise Men dreamed of a new beginning.
Then, several years later, Jesus walked this earth and dreams came true.
The sick were healed.
The poor had food.
The forgotten and ignored were seen.
The children were welcomed.
Everyone was invited to the table, and the world has never been the same.
So tonight, we are those who dream.
Tonight, we dream the same dreams of our ancestors before us.
Tonight, we dream of justice and mercy, of love and kindness, of peace and hope.

READ

Read **Mark 13:24-37** and then read the following poems:

Dreams by Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Harlem by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore -
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat
Or crust and sugar over -
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

REFLECT AND SHARE

Think about, journal, or discuss around the table:
What is a line, an idea, or a feeling that stands out for you from the scripture or the poem? Why?

What are the dreams you carry into this Advent season?

CLOSING

Read **Psalm 80:1-7, 17-9** as a closing prayer.

THOSE WHO *prepare the way* DREAM

2ND Sunday in Advent

OPENING WORDS

John the Baptist calls the crowds into the journey of repentance and transformation. Similarly, we are called to prepare the way for God's message of love and liberation to be shouted, heard, and received. Those who dream make way for righteousness and peace to kiss, for faithfulness to spring up from the ground.

LIGHT THE SECOND CANDLE

Begin by lighting the first candle. Then, one person can read the prayer or multiple people can take turns each reading a line.

I dream of the first pitch of opening season.

I dream of a laundry day, where each sock finds its mate.

I dream of family home for the holidays.

I dream of good books and homemade meals.

I dream of sunset drives with the windows down.

I dream of conversations across party lines.

I dream of more bridges and fewer walls.

I dream of more laughter and less fear.

I dream of more listening and fewer tears.

But most of all, I dream of peace like a river.

Today, we light the candle of peace.

Light candle.

May it remind us that there is another way.
Amen.

A Blessing Called Sanctuary by Jan Richardson

You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter
entirely -

nothing of you
found foreign or strange,
nothing of your life
that you were asked
to leave behind
or to carry in silence
or in shame.

Tentative steps
became settling in,
leaning into the blessing
that enfolded you,
taking your place
in the circle
that stunned you
with its unimagined grace.

You began to breathe again,
to move without fear,
to speak with abandon
the words you carried
in your bones,
that echoed in your being.

You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing
is that it will not leave you alone,
will not let you linger
in safety,
in stasis.

The time will come
when this blessing
will ask you to leave,
not because it has tired of you
but because it desires for you
to become the sanctuary
that you have found -
to speak your word
into the world,
to tell what you have heard
with your own ears
seen with your own eyes,
known in your own heart:

that you are beloved,
precious child of God,
beautiful to behold,
and you are welcome
and more than welcome
here.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Think about, journal, or discuss around the table:

What is a line, an idea, or a feeling that stands out for you from the scripture or the poem? Why?

Tell a story about a time when someone came alongside you or supported you. How did it feel? What did it change?

CLOSING

Read **Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26** as a closing prayer.

THOSE WHO *are not alone* DREAM

4TH Sunday in Advent

OPENING WORDS

Today, we recognize what preceded Mary's song of praise: news that was disorienting and bewildering, possibly threatening her life. Together, Mary and Elizabeth find courage and comfort in spite of their unusual circumstances. We, too, are called to carry, support, and encourage one another's dreams.

LIGHT THE FOURTH CANDLE

Begin by lighting the first three candles. Then, one person can read the prayer or multiple people can take turns each reading a line.

I dream of music that makes my heart swell.
I dream of trees that take my breath away.
I dream of sunrises that wrap me in light.
I dream of family dinners that feel like home.
I dream of church services that give me hope.
I dream of love as the default.

Today, as we draw near to Christmas Day, we light the candle of love.

Light candle.

May this light burn bright as a reminder that God is here and
God is love.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God for a love like that.
Amen.

READ

*Read **Luke 1:46-55** and then read the following poem:*

READ

*Read **Mark 1:1-8** and then read the following poem:*

Caged Bird by Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of
another breeze
and the trade winds soft
through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on
a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the
grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a
nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Think about, journal, or discuss around the table:

What is a line, an idea, or a feeling that stands out for you from the scripture or the poem? Why?

What is one thing you can do this week to help prepare the way of righteousness, liberation, or just peace in your home, your community, or the world?

CLOSING

*Read **Psalms 85:1-2, 8-13** as a closing prayer.*

THOSE WHO *sow joy* DREAM

3RD sunday in Advent

OPENING WORDS

Ultimately, dreams sow joy, even if that joy doesn't immediately spring forth. Sowing seeds into the soil always feels risky and feeble - how can something so small become something so beautiful, so big, and so nourishing? Like Mary, we are called to tend and nurture the dreams God has woven into us.

LIGHT THE THIRD CANDLE

Begin by lighting the first and second candles. Then, one person can read the prayer or multiple people can take turns each reading a line.

I dream of dance parties in the kitchen.
I dream of laughter that is contagious.
I dream of birthday candles and another beautiful year.
I dream of family game nights and dinner parties with friends.
I dream of pillow forts, fireflies, and front porch swings.
Today we light the candle of joy as a reminder
that God's dream for this world involves the end of all tears.
God's dream for this world involves a joy that overflows and is
contagious.

Light candle.

So may this fire burn bright, and as it does, may we sing.
May we dance.
May we laugh.
May we hold onto the people we love.
May we sow joy in a hurting world, and may it be an act of
holy resistance.
Amen.

READ

Read **Luke 1:46-55** and then read the following poem:

A Peace Dream by Claire Smith

I dream
Of a loving world
Where we see each other
With God's eyes;

I dream
Of a resourceful world
Where we cherish the unique gift
Of each other.

I dream
Of a hopeful world
Where we recognize the power of God's grace
To transform and make new;

I dream of peace.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Think about, journal, or discuss around the table:

What is a line, an idea, or a feeling that stands out for you from the scripture or the poem? Why?

What is one thing that brings you joy right now?

What is one thing you can do this week to sow seeds of joy in your life, your family, the community or the church?

CLOSING

Read **Psalm 126** as a closing prayer.