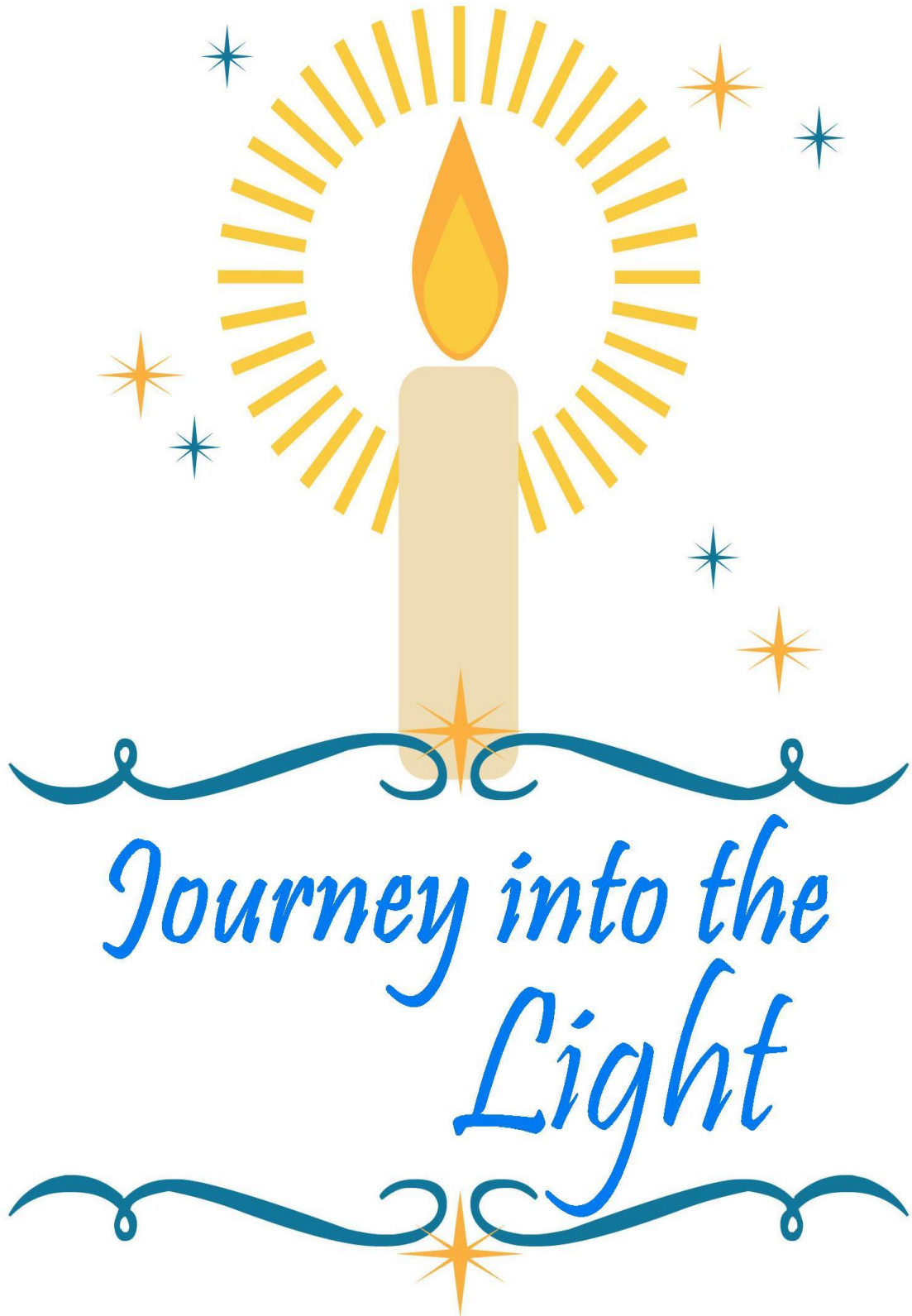


2018 ADVENT-URE: JOURNEY INTO THE LIGHT
Third Week of Advent: EMBRACE THE LIGHT



*Journey into the
Light*

Illumination

Ephesians 1:18

“My the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones.”

When I was a boy of eight or nine, my Dad used to call my attention to a particular tree we were close by in our walk through the woods. He would emphasize the words, “Just look at that tree, Don. Just look at it!”

To me a tree was just a tree, no big deal! But his insistence led me later to realize he had seen the tree with a deeper set of eyes, a depth I can relate to now.

Don Evason

Embraced by the Light

My most vivid moment of embracing the light began over fifty years ago. It was at that time that a young missionary was serving in a Lutheran school in Monrovia, Liberia. This missionary was visiting my home congregation in Clear Spring, MD. I was eager to ask him if he could connect me to a young girl in Monrovia who might like to be my pen pal. Thus began my journey with Bendu Cooper.

Bendu became my lifelong pen pal at that point. We were from totally different worlds. She was an upper class Liberian Congo girl, and I was a middle class American girl. Bendu’s father was the Minister of Agriculture in Liberia, and I was the proud daughter of the Clear Spring postmaster. But, we were alike in so many ways. We were typical teenaged girls, we both had a passion for music, and we each had a deep and abiding faith in God.

Bendu remained in Liberia until the Country people in Liberia decided to revolt against the Congo people in 1980. It was to be a violent and deadly revolution, and many of the Congo people were tortured and killed. Bendu made it safely to America, went to college in the states, and eventually settled in Durham, NC, where she still resides today.

We continued to be connected through letters, and eventually through phone calls and texts. Our main connection, however, was through love, commitment, and prayer. We had never met, but there was always a love that endured through the years – an honesty and faithfulness. We embraced each other’s similarities and differences, and we knew each other’s hearts.

Then, in August of 2018, I made a decision to carry our relationship to the next level. I decided to finally meet my beloved Bendu and to embrace her in person. I didn't want any more time to pass before we actually saw each other. We both have physical limitations and struggle to get around. But our similar qualities of faith and determination enabled us to join together, at last.

I flew to Durham and waited patiently for Bendu's arrival at the airport. We had never seen each other except for childhood photos, but we immediately recognized each other somehow. There were tears of happiness and many hugs. We were finally together – sisters in Christ and sisters in heart and soul. We had a wonderful four days together, and I had an opportunity to meet several of her friends in Durham. We also looked at photos, read old letters, and sang hymns that we both loved.

I could feel God's love and light shining down on us. We had been worlds apart for over fifty years, but were finally within each other's embrace.

Nancy Newkirk

Embracing the Light

We cannot always find light when we need it. For some, as we approach the holiday season, memories from the past, loss from the present or a sense of isolation will touch our hearts. We wonder how to see our way through these dark hours of aloneness and loss.

Yet there is light coming. It may be hard to find amidst winter's darkness. Yet we have before us the choice to go on with hope—or to fear that hope will be absent in the end.

Hold someone's hand. Risk seeing the light in another's eyes. See the stars in the sky—or in your memory. Such small fragments of light! Yet we can choose to act in faith that this time the light will appear to us. We tremble to hope. Yet we carry with us the gift of faith, the seed of faith, the longing for faith we invite into our hearts. Into our hearts we receive the small light that shines just for us—no matter how distant it may seem—or be. And as we dare to embrace the small hopes we glean day by darkening day, the hope we risk draws us forward in prayer and opens our hearts.

Watch through the darkness. The light will come.

Valerie Wills

Shining Our Light for Children to Live and Learn in the Lord

All year, God calls Christians to “live as children of the light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, right, and true.” (Ephesians 5: 8-9) This rings especially true in Advent, as we prepare to share the light as found in Jesus to others. How can we effectively demonstrate this light for children?

Parents often wonder about this more than others. After all, at the child’s baptism, the Lord challenged us to bring His light to the young ones. The Ephesians 5: 8-9 verse noted above spoke to me. My personal verses to meditate upon at Confirmation came from later in that same chapter, when Paul tells the Ephesians to greet one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord in their hearts, thanking Him through Jesus.

Around this time, Joy, born in Advent herself, came to me citing difficulty with her multiplication tables. I knew that learning them by memorization, as I had, would bore her silly. We pondered together what might work. When she sang for me the song her second grade teacher had trotted out using “Yankee Doodle” to learn the multiples of eight, I felt the light. We went through an old hymnal in the house and began making our own multiplication songs. Rewording her favorite hymns helps Joy work on math while remembering her connection to God and His light. Through music, Paul may have also taught the Ephesians how to help one another and remember their connection to God and His light.

Veronica Bergschneider



Advent DEVOTIONALS