Advent Devotional December 21, 2026

Scripture

Isaiah 29:9-24

9 Be astounded and stunned;
blind yourselves and be blind!
Be drunk but not from wine;
stagger but not from strong drink!
10 For the Lord has poured out upon you
a spirit of deep sleep;
he has closed your eyes (the prophets)
and covered your heads (the seers).

11 The vision of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read with the command, "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for it is sealed." 12 And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, "Read this," they say, "We cannot read."

13 The Lord said:
Because these people draw near with their mouths
and honor me with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me
and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote,
14 so I will again do
amazing things with this people,
shocking and amazing.
The wisdom of their wise shall perish,
and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden.

15 Woe to those who hide a plan too deep for the Lord,
whose deeds are in the dark,
and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"
16 You turn things upside down!
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?
Shall the thing made say of its maker,
"He did not make me,"
or the thing formed say of the one who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?

17 Shall not Lebanon in a very little while
become a fruitful field
and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest?
18 On that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a scroll,
and freed from gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.
19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord,
and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.
20 For the tyrant shall be no more,
and the scoffer shall cease to be;

all those alert to do evil shall be cut off—
21 those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit,
who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate
and undermine justice for the one in the right.

22 Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

"No longer shall Jacob be ashamed;
no longer shall his face grow pale.
23 For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.
24 And those who err in spirit will come to understanding,
and those who grumble will accept instruction."

Devotion

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Living high in the Rocky Mountains, I have learned that darkness feels deeper as winter approaches. The peaks surrounding our lush valley hide the sun long before sunset and delay its appearance each morning. By Advent, the days feel even shorter because of the shadows that linger long after dawn.

Just when it seems we cannot endure another hour of darkness, the winter solstice arrives. The longest night of the year marks the point at which darkness reaches its greatest length. Like many congregations, we gather at dusk on the shortest day and lament together, lighting candles and listening to scripture before offering prayers that give voice to our grief, our hopes, and our deepest longings.

Isaiah 29:18 declares, "Out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see." Isaiah promises that even before the light comes, there is hope. This is not to say that the darkness is an illusion; the darkness is real. The gloom, grief, and confusion are real. Yet God declares that darkness will not have the final word. Even when nothing appears to be different, a turning has begun.

Advent is a time when we remember the darkness of the world before the light of Christ began to shine. In Isaiah, that light was only something to be hoped for. As the lyrics to "O Holy Night" remind us, "Long lay the world in sin and error pining / 'til He appeared and the soul felt its worth. / A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices / for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!"

Tonight, though we will endure the longest night of the year, we do so knowing that things are turning. Even though the darkness is pervasive and the cold still seeps into our bones, tomorrow the light will begin to stay a little longer. We are living out the promise that "the eyes of the blind shall see."

Prayer

God of light, we linger in the darkness today, watching and longing, praying and hoping. As the night reaches its fullest measure, remind us that Your light is drawing near. Open our eyes to see Your presence in the shadows and Your promises shining at the horizon. We thank you that even when the night feels long, we are never alone. Through Christ, the Light of the World, amen.