

INTRODUCTION

Let us light candles

By Donna Frischknecht Jackson, Editor of *Presbyterians Today*

About this devotional

Welcome to *Presbyterians Today's* Advent and Christmas devotional, “Let Us Light Candles: Matthew 25 and the work of Advent.” This extended online devotional — taking us not just through Advent but through Christmastide and ending with Epiphany, Jan. 6 — brings to you the inspiring words in Howard Thurman’s poem “I Will Light Candles This Christmas.”

Thurman, a Baptist pastor, theologian and civil rights activist, was born in 1899. The grandson of a former slave, Thurman was named by *Life* magazine in 1953 as one of the 12 greatest preachers in the country. The pastor not only co-founded San Francisco’s Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in 1944 — the first interfaith and intercultural congregation in the United States — but he also mentored a young Martin Luther King Jr., who received his Ph.D. in 1955 at Boston University, where Thurman was serving as the first Black dean of Marsh Chapel. Thurman’s most well-known book, “Jesus and the Disinherited,” published in 1949, illustrates the pastor’s theology. In it he expounds on Jesus’ example of unconditional love and illustrates how that love not only helps the disinherited endure oppression, it also changes the heart of oppressors.

Nowhere better can Thurman’s belief in such a redemptive, transformative love be seen than in his writings about the light that came into the world at Christmastime.

How to use the devotional

Each week’s Advent and Christmas theme will be a stanza from Thurman’s poem, followed by a reading from Scripture, a short meditation and closing prayer. At the start of each week will be a reflection question in which I invite you to light a candle (or play the video of the candle provided) and ponder more deeply that week’s theme.

I also invite you throughout the seasons of Advent and Christmas to submit pictures of the candles you are lighting — actual wax candles or

photos of the “flames,” the little actions done by your hands — that are lighting your community with love. These pictures will be posted on *Presbyterians Today's* social media sites — Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

It is my hope that by Epiphany, we have many lights burning brightly. Why? Because our world has been shrouded in the darkness of racial and political unrest, and the cloud of pandemic uncertainties is still hovering low. But there is a light coming to us, one promised by God. It is a light that John’s Gospel says “shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5).

It has been a powerful privilege to journey with Thurman as I wrote this devotional for you. I now hope that you find your journey with Thurman this season just as powerful. Let us begin these Advent and Christmas seasons lighting those candles Thurman envisioned — candles of joy, hope, courage, peace, grace and love.

Social media participation

Presbyterians Today wants to see your light shine this holiday. Submit pictures of the candles you are lighting (actual candles or how you are shining light in the world by living out the words of Matthew 25 to give water to those who thirst, visit those in prison and clothe the naked). Include your name, church and a brief description of the picture. Send to Donna Frischknecht Jackson at editor@pcusa.org.



I Will Light Candles This Christmas

BY HOWARD THURMAN

I will light candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.

