



## Traditions, Part 2

December 2, 2020

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Boom! It's Advent, and I'm already behind. Although I don't have my Advent wreath or Advent calendar out yet, the [Presbytery's electronic Advent calendar](#), at the bottom of our home webpage, is up and running. Check back every day for a little surprise and joy! We've fixed it so you can't cheat by looking ahead. I've already heard too many of you confessing that, according to the number of remaining doors on your chocolate Advent calendar, it's December 21. We know how you are!

Like Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day are also prime times for home and church traditions, like wreaths and calendars. My home congregation, like many, held an annual Christmas Eve service, complete with the singing of Silent Night in our darkened sanctuary and the passing of a flame from candle to candle. This year, however, the likelihood of passing more than a flame from one person to another hopefully means this tradition is on hold.

Like that flame in the darkened sanctuary, my Advent and Christmas memories focus on light: candles, strings of light, luminaries, blinking lights, tree lights. As a child, I would lay under the Christmas tree with wonder; my grandson now does the same. I have 8mm confirmation of wearing festive jammies on Christmas morning and squinting into the blinding light of our home movie camera. As my eyes watered, my parents would tell me to look at the camera and wave. Those are tortured movie clips from my childhood.

As an adult, I still seek out lights during Advent. Denver's Larimer Square featured colored market lights strung across the street, and store owners crafted unique Christmas scenes in their brightly lit windows. In Louisville, Kentucky, we crept through a gigantic cavern with an endless line of other cars, just to see animals, elves, and holiday decorations outlined in flashing lights. Now, in Wisconsin, we've marveled at the light displays at Boerner Botanical Gardens.



The diminishing daylight hours and gloominess of the skies cause many of us to struggle with seasonal depression. Darkness pervades, and with it, reminders of what we've lost and what is not right in the world. Even a single light, however, can shatter the darkness and not be swallowed up. The season's lights are a persistent reminder of how the Light of Christ shines in the midst of evil and is not diminished. "Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" (John 8:12)

I marvel at your creativity in carrying on Advent traditions in virus-free ways. Faith Springs is hosting a Christmas CARoling event -- a drive-in Christmas carol sing; Crossroads has marked out an Advent trail on its grounds that allows visitors to journey to the manger and, like the Three Wise Men, to offer a gift for one of the congregation's mission partners; North Shore is inviting all members to decorate milk jug luminaries to light the church patio. The pandemic doesn't mean we forgo all our traditions, but it does mean we might need to reinvent them. Have fun with that!