



ADVENT 2021

A VISUAL DEVOTIONAL

WE LIGHT AMSTERDAM

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Instructions

General Instructions

- Resources for the Devotional: We Light Amsterdam Devotional (This PDF)
- [We Light Amsterdam – Blog Post](#) (for the Reading sections explained below)

Advent 2021 consists of 5 total works of art. 1 each for the four Sundays in Advent and a final work to be delivered to your inbox on Christmas Morning. The Blog Post will be reproduced here for your convenience and following the blog post will be a devotional. This week it is in three parts. You can work that into your week however you like – either taking it in an all-in-one sitting or spreading it out during the week.

The works for each week are as follows:

Week 1 – We Light Amsterdam (an art installation)

Week 2 - The Slave Ship, J. M. W. Turner

Week 3 - IThemba Tower, Johannesburg (an art installation)

Week 4 - Nativity at Night, Geertgen tot Sint Jans

Christmas Morning - A Meat Stall with the Holy Family Giving Alms, Pieter Aertsen

These works are far from traditional and nudge us to think about Advent and our ongoing celebration of the incarnation in new and fresh ways. The theme of the series is Light out of Darkness. Glad you are joining me for this journey.

We Light Amsterdam

Festival of Lights in Amsterdam



During the long, cold winter months of December and January a magical Festival of Lights takes place in Amsterdam. Lighting the city with enchanting art installations, the city twinkles and glows, giving light and warmth to both citizens and visitors, during the darkest months of the year.

20 to 30 works of art are selected each year and installed along a route through the city. Visitors can take a walking tour or view the installations from a boat on the canals.

"We Light Amsterdam" - A Collaborative Art Project

In 2013, Company New Heroes created a project for the Festival of Lights. Instead of an artist, or group of artists creating a light installation, New Heroes artists, Pascal Leboucq and Lucas De Man asked the people of Amsterdam to participate in their project by donating lamps from their homes. The artists provided the initiative, but the people of Amsterdam would 'create' the artwork. 1,100 lamps were donated.

The lamps reflected the people who donated them, old and new, modern and antique, with no two exactly the same. The lamps and their endless cords created a river of light through the dark night. Some of the lamps had shades, others stood as bare light bulbs. If you examine the photographs of the installation you will likely find a lamp quite similar to one you or your family have owned.

Oddly compelling, the higgledy-piggledy arrangement of lamps invites us to move closer and consider the artists intent. Each lamp is quite different from the one next to it and exists in it's own space, while also being an integral part of the whole. In this river of light each lamp contributes it's glow and creates something beyond itself. Whether small and insignificant, or grand and rich looking, all of the lamps play their part.

All of the lamps are arranged on the ground and were observed by those walking alongside them. However, there was a ladder that visitors could climb so the work could be viewed from above. It was only when changing the viewers location that another element of the work came into focus. The lamps formed the words, "We light Amsterdam."

"I Amsterdam" Campaign

The phrase "I Amsterdam," was well known in the city. A famous sign was placed outside the Rijksmuseum in 2004. The sign has recently been removed, but was originally part of an ad campaign. The sign was created as a symbol of inclusion which celebrated Amsterdam's diverse population.

The message of the light display expanded on the original idea and changed the messaging to the even more inclusive pronoun, we. From above the display read, "We light Amsterdam" and the people of Amsterdam literally lit up the display through their donations and participation in the project.

Unity in Community

I find we often feel protective of our individuality, our space, and our importance. Perhaps we fear that validating and celebrating everyone, young and old, male and female, rich and poor etc. will someone limit and contract our own world and influence. This work seems to counter that self-protective train of thought. Instead of becoming less, joining together with others enhances and expands our own stories. In a world that seems determined to divide us, I find this river of lamps encourages me to join together with the larger community, to pull in those who are often overlooked and include them. In our stream of lamps it's been noted that even when a light bulb went out, the lamp continued to live on because the lamps around it kept it visible.



As the weeks of the display went on, the artists would check in every few days to see if cords were still connected, and light bulbs were still working. Moving amongst the lamps as caretakers they maintained the source of power that kept the lamps shining. In this case the role of the artist was one of inspirer,

initiator, and caretaker, but it was the community of Amsterdam that contributed the elements and the power that created this moving piece of art.

Celebrating Advent

While this project was about Amsterdam and creating a urban work, I came across its existence through an Advent post on ArtWay.eu in an article by Jose Verheule. (linked below)

As we are moving into both winter and Advent I found this work compelling. One of the great themes of Advent art is light, and for the past few Advent season I've created Advent Devotionals around various works of art. This year I found myself drawn to the idea of light coming into darkness as I considered this pre-Christmas season. I found myself looking for works of art that highlighted 'light'. Hard to beat an entire Festival dedicated to bringing light into the dark of a Northern winter.



So, this season I will be kicking off my devotional by digging a bit deeper into the ideas this work raises. If you would like to follow along this Advent Season make sure that you are subscribed to my email list. Each Sunday of Advent you will receive an email with that weeks devotional.

Additional Information

The group that put together this display, [New Heroes](#), uses multidisciplinary storytelling to connect and inspire conversations that question value systems based on infinite growth, and instead promotes values and systems that focus on people, nature, and the vulnerable. The shift they are seeking to facilitate is one that moves away from domination and toward full participation by all members of society. The art installation we will look at today embodies these values and, on multiple levels, challenges us to consider our place within ourselves, our families, and our communities. You can read more about them [here](#).

The original article, "We light Amsterdam" can be found [here](#).

The Devotional for We Light Amsterdam

This year's Advent Devotional is going to be a bit of a departure for me. While I have always been intrigued by contemporary art and how art can play an interactive role in public spaces, I've never explored these types of installations on my blog.

This year, for Advent, I will be examining two urban works, both created in 2013. I hope that by combining these with a few traditional paintings you will find a new richness in this Advent season.

This week we will be looking at a work that was displayed in Amsterdam in 2013 during the city's Festival of Light.

Verse for this week

Isaiah 9:2: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Part 1 - Exploring

Today we will be spending some time considering this work.

First, you'll want to go to my blog and read about the art installation we will be considering this week.

I'd encourage you to spend time studying the photographs below. I'm including several photographs here for you to consider.

- Look closely at the lamps, do any look familiar to you?
- Look closely at the mess of cords and on/off switches swirling along the ground?
- Take note of heights, varieties, colors, and shapes?

Part 2 - Expanding

As I noted in the article, my first exposure to this work was a blogpost on Artway.eu. One of the statements in that post struck me.

"Once in a while the two artists come by to check the power and to see if the bulbs that have stopped burning can be revived, fulfilling the role of inspirer and healer. I thought of the well-known statement by Jesus: 'You are the light of the world.' This he said not only to his disciples, but to the whole crowd of people who had come to listen to him: young and old, sick and healthy, from far and nearby, indigenous and immigrants. A true mixture. He was their inspirer and healer. But they were the light!"

As we enter into this season of Advent, and we anticipate ‘light entering darkness’ we tend to focus on that one night in Bethlehem and the birth of the Christ Child. But I was struck anew by the fact that Jesus was the initiator and inspirer, but his goal was that we ‘light the world’.

This month we will look at a variety of works that follow the theme of God breaking into the darkness and brokenness of our world with his light, but as we do that I want to be encouraged to remember that we are also meant to be light breaking into darkness. We join with Christ in lighting the world with love and grace.

Have you experienced Christ’s light breaking into the dark moments of your life, either directly, or through the light offered by others who walk with you in this broken world?

Have you had the opportunity to offer light to others who are struggling in the dark?

As we move through this season of preparation, as we see the Christmas lights illuminating our towns, I pray we remember that Christ brought light so that we could be light.

Here is what I mean by being light:

- When you participate in Christmas activities like putting up lights on your house or on your tree, use it as an act of prayer, reminding yourself of your identity as a light bearer and think of ways you can put this into practice.
- When you donate to charity this Christmas you are sharing light.
- When you visit a home, or a person in the hospital, or go caroling (maybe that will happen this year) it is lifting a candle to those you bless with presence.

Part 3 - Connecting

In Part 2 we talked about participating with Christ and being light to the world.

Living in a modern age where we can light up a house with the flick of a switch, it’s novel to be in darkness with nothing but a candle or flashlight. And yet, in those rare moments when camping or going through a power outage, it’s always fun to see how a single candle can break the darkness and create a circle of light. That single, small flame can bring light and a sense of relief when we are surrounded by unending blackness.

Even as individuals, we have the ability to add light to the lives that we touch. But it’s when we join our lights together that we begin to understand the transformations we can make in a dark and broken world.

One lamp would have provided light in that dark winter in Amsterdam, but 1,100 lamps transformed the space and drew more and more people to its light.

As we wrap up this week, consider how your light shines on those around you, and how you can join with others to multiply the light for the good of your communities.

- In your gatherings with friends and family, be intentional in preparing topics of conversation that are positive and uplifting. Come up with lists of questions that will guide the conversation into sharing a common concern or interest.
- Decide not to engage in debate this holiday season, take the high road and say no to dark conversations that bring tension into the holidays.
- Review your conversational style and add words of encouragement and gratitude, listen and affirm others.
- Consider joining a non-profit or church missions project this year so that you expand your light and collaborate with others throughout the year. Habitat for Humanity, Homeless shelters and outreach organizations, and many other organizations are always looking for help in many different ways.

I'll leave you with this quote by Walt Whitman, "Pointing to another world will never stop vice among us; shedding light over this world can alone help us."

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