
A Story for Advent

— Mary Knighton

The time of Advent is also a season of light for many traditions, including Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. A goal in Waldorf education is to be inclusive in our festival celebrations through offering archetypal pictures that convey truths of universal human and spiritual experiences. This story was created with this intention. It and others like it can be shared with all members of our school communities.

Long, long ago in a small village there lived an old light keeper. Every day he cleaned and polished his lantern so the light would shine brightly. He tended the flame carefully so it burned tall and strong. Whenever any village people needed to light their own lanterns, they could always go to the light keeper to receive a new spark.

However, the light keeper was getting very old. It was harder and harder for him to keep the light shining brightly. He called for someone new to tend the light. But any new young light keepers did not last long at the job. They did not want to sit and tend the light all night. They wanted to dance and play and eat and drink. And they left the lantern unattended. Slowly the lantern began to get dimmer. Soot built up in the windows, and the flame burned low. It was harder and harder for the villagers to light their own lanterns from this dim light. The village grew darker and darker.

One evening in midwinter, a young girl from the countryside came into the village seeking a light for her lantern. But when she came to the light keeper, the last tiny flame flickered, faltered and died out. The girl stood alone in the dark. "Where can I find light?" she wondered. The old, feeble light keeper was sitting in the corner. He spoke. "Deep in the forest you will find the light. But you must walk carefully and listen closely. Only then will you find the way."

The girl thanked the old man and walked out towards the forest. She shivered as she stepped

***"May I be a
light-bearer
in the world's
wintry night."***

—Source Unknown

into the dense woods. It grew darker and darker, and she had to feel her way between the trees. Her foot hit something hard in the path. It was a big stone. She pushed and rolled the stone to the side of the path. "Thank you," said the stone. "So many people have kicked me on their way, but no one has bothered to move me to make it easier to pass by." Now whenever a stone stood in the path, she gently moved it aside.

The girl continued on. After some time, she felt a small fir tree blocking her path. It had fallen over in the wind. She propped it back up and patted the earth down around its roots. "Thank you," said the tree. "Now I can grow straight and tall."

On she went. She heard a slight whimpering sound below her. She knelt down and felt something soft and furry. It was a little squirrel with a hurt foot. Carefully she wrapped a soft cloth around its foot. "Thank you for your kindness," said the squirrel. "If you will put me into my hole, I'm sure my foot will be better soon." She lifted the squirrel up into his hole in the tree and gave it a little nut she had in her pocket.

Now she was in the deepest, darkest part of the forest. She stopped to gather her courage. She did not know where she would find the light. Then she heard crying. She ventured forward and there on a stump sat a very young child. "I've lost my way," cried the child, "and I'm so cold and hungry."

"Here, take my cloak." The girl wrapped her cloak around the small child. She reached into her pocket and took out a bit of bread and gave it to the child. "Sit on my lap and I'll keep you warm." She put the child onto her lap and sat down to rest. She closed her eyes for a moment and felt a warm light stream into her. When she opened her eyes, it didn't seem quite so dark anymore. She looked up into the sky and saw all the stars as they shone brightly in the night sky. She looked at the ground and the stones seemed to glow with a soft light. The leaves on the plants and

trees shimmered and glistened. All around in little holes and burrows she saw the bright eyes of the night animals glowing.

Then she looked into her hand and she saw that her lantern was burning brightly with a strong, tall flame. “Oh,” she cried, “I can take you back to the village now.” She led the child by the hand. It was easy to see the path now. Her lantern shone brightly and all the stones glowed, leading the way.

Soon they were back in the village. She found the child’s home. His parents rejoiced at the return of their son. Then, as she shared the light gathered on her journey, they rejoiced at the glow that began to shine from their own lanterns. The young girl went from door to door and shared this light with everyone in the village. Soon the village began to glow again.

The young girl became the new light keeper. She tended her flame with care, and she taught all those who came to her how to care for their lanterns so the light inside would always shine brightly. ♦

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Let it shine,

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