

The First Sunday after Christmas: 27 December, 2009
Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7; John 1: 1-18
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"What has come to being in Him was life and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

These words from John's Gospel come from a portion, which is known by many as the Prologue. There are no angels or manger, no shepherds in the field keeping watch. John's Nativity story, told in these first 18 verses, proclaims the Christmas story none the less. John's Prologue shows the Christians of John's day as well as Christians today the clear-cut theological difference the incarnation makes in the life of this world. While the other birth narratives focus on the earthly origins of Jesus, John's focus is on the heavenly existence of the Word. The Word, who is in the beginning. The Word, who is outside the human constraints of time and place. The Word incarnate, who gives life and light to all.

During visits to St. Christopher's, my home parish, I have been overjoyed to see increasing numbers of young children and parents at worship. New and unfamiliar faces mean growth. Like ECR, St. Christopher's is reaching out to the larger community with a renewed vigor and emphasis on Children's ministry. Like ECR, they are growing. This past Sunday, while visiting St. Christopher's I again experienced this joy and felt Christ's light breaking into our world.

The incarnation, as expressed through John's Prologue is central to his gospel. Christ is seen the eternal expression of God. Jesus is God incarnate, fully human yet fully Divine. Jesus the Son and the Father are one. Jesus reveals God to the world as never before. This Revealer, Jesus, is not mere man. He is the Word of God become flesh, made human. Biblical scholar Rudolph Bultmann tells us that, "It is in Jesus' sheer humanity that He is the Revealer." No one has ever seen God; it is only through Jesus His Son, who is nearest the Father's heart that He is made known." Jesus the *Logos*, is the tangible personification of what God wants to say to humanity.

Children's chapel begins at 10:00. While waiting for the 10:30 service to begin I couldn't resist going to the chapel to check out what the children's service.

Reaching the chapel door, I was greeted with the sounds of guitar music, children singing and the advent wreath burning. All the chapel assistants are wearing We Will T-shirts. We will live out our baptismal covenant. We will support these children in their life in Christ. In this chapel, this holy, sacred space that is exactly what is going on. The children brake into their next song. I couldn't resist joining in on all the fun. Children, parents and chapel volunteers began to clap and sing a song that many of us may remember from our childhood. *This Little Light of Mine*. "This little light of mine I'm go'na let it shine. This little light of mine I'm go'na let it shine."

The light that Jesus, the Word, brings is a guiding light. He brings the light of God. This light can be made manifest within every human being, freeing them from the past, endowing them with new creativity and power. In receiving this light, people need no longer walk in darkness. Jesus' coming dissipates the shadows of darkness and despair. He overcomes the darkness of death and the grave. Through him you and I can fully become the people that God creates us to be.

In our Lord is life and this life is the light of all. The light that Jesus brings puts chaos in flight. It is the light which comes into being at the world's creation. It is this light that shines on this world illuminating the dark spaces human nature creates. It shines light on injustice, oppression, discrimination, poverty and hunger wherever it exists. What the poet Robert Burns so aptly calls, "mans' inhumanity to man." It is a Light that calls for peace among all peoples of this world. It is a light that calls us to care for those without adequate medical care, safe housing and those children that fall victim to sub standard education.

This Light blazes out of the darkness. It burns so brightly that the darkness cannot put it out. With this illuminating light the woundedness of this world is revealed. Humanity's brokenness is revealed. Through this light you and I see a world that is not as the creator intended.

It is a light that shines upon our own brokenness. It peels away our masks, our false images. From time to time we all find ourselves wearing masks. I do. These masks protect us from the hurts and sadness of this world. "It doesn't matter that Joe got that promotion and I didn't. Deep down I worry about how I will make the next mortgage payment, support my family and put braces on the kid's teeth." I'll smile anyway. "It's okay if Sally gets picked for the softball team and I don't. I'll smile and pretend that I don't care. Inside my heart aches. It breaks."

Christ's light and love allows each of us to stand before God and one another flaws, warts and all. It allows us to be fully known to ourselves and others. When sadness and darkness threaten to overwhelm us, the incarnate Christ suffers with us. God's holy and life giving Spirit is with us.

It is Jesus' incarnation that unites Him to the everydayness of the human experience. St. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians, "God sent his Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father. You and I are God's sons and daughters by adoption. Jesus calls each of us to live our lives as children of God. We are loved with an unconditional love. We are beloved, known and wanted by the Maker of all things. Through grace you and I no longer live under the bondage of sin. We live under the law of God's love

Through His incarnation God does not remain distant from His people, remote and isolated. Jesus chose to live with humanity in the midst of human weakness, confusion and pain to be bonded with humanity. He took on flesh to know joy, pain, suffering and loss. By His entrance in to this world, human beings, who belong to the earthly and mortal realm, are given a chance for life. Life everlasting.

Standing in the chapel, I watch with wonder as the song continues. Little fingers for a brief moment become waving candles. "Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm go'na let it shine. Let it shine let it shine let it shine! The guitar continues to play. The children sing even louder.

As the people of God you and I are not to hide our light, the light of Christ under the proverbial bushel.

Christ's light and God's Holy and life giving Spirit empower us. You and I are able to reach out our hands in love to our neighbor. We can reach out to one another with the light and love of God. You and I can let Christ 's light shine through us into the darkness of this world. By sharing Christ light we can bring God's love and hope. Hope to a world that desperately needs hope.

The children in the chapel sing even more enthusiastically. They sing with fervor and determination. They sing with an exuberant joy that I imagine could easily match the chorus of heavenly hosts. "Won't let Satan blow it out I'm go'na let it shine. Won't let Satan blow it out, I'm go'na let it shine.

Christ's light shines in the darkness of this world. It will not be extinguished by the world's brokenness. Yes, there will be times of despair. There will still be injustices to right. There will continue to be people in need of help, simply to maintain even a minimal standard of living. There will be wars and rumours of war. These problems will not be fully solved until God's Kingdom is fully realized. As God's people, you and I can rest assured on God's promise. His kingdom will come.

Sadly, John reminds us that Jesus' own people did not recognize him. They fail to see the light. They fail to recognize the son of God in their very midst. The Light who comes into the world to bring healing and wholeness. The Light who comes into the world to suffer crucifixion. To be raised from the dead.

How often do you and I fail to recognize this Light, God's presence? Do we see the face of Jesus, the light of Christ, in the faces of friends or strangers? Do we see Christ in the crabby neighbor next door? The cashier at the checkout counter? The man standing on the corner wondering where his next meal is going to come from? Do we share the light of Christ's redeeming love with them? Or do we hide that light under a bushel? Do we let the cares and concerns of this world extinguish Christ's light within us?

His light will shine in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. This Christmastide and always, may you and I let our lights shine. Amen.