

A Gift of Light

John 1:1-18

Crossroads Christian Church

Jeremiah 31:7-14 January 4, 2015 Christmas 2B

They tell a story about a king who had three sons. He had to choose which son would be the crown prince—the one to inherit his throne. How should he choose? They were all fine young men, each with different virtues and strengths. So he called them together, and gave to each one a small treasure chest with their equivalent of tens of thousands dollars in it. “I want you each to buy me a Christmas present,” he explained, “and the one who makes the best choice will be my choice for crown prince. There’s only one condition. The gift has to fill an entire room this size.” The princes gasped, because it was a very large room, and each prince would fill one just like it. They had a few months, though, to plan and work out something. The oldest, Prince Alexander, called in royal advisors to begin planning. The middle, Prince Benjamin, went to the university to meet with the brightest professors. The youngest, Prince Christopher, took a walk. Outside the palace gate, he saw a poor beggar, and his heart was filled with pity, so he dropped in some money from his treasure chest—not much, but enough to give the beggar food and clothing. Then he passed by a cottage and heard parents crying over the crib of a terribly ill child. So he gave them enough money to get medical attention. The pattern continued. The older two worked busily at their task, and the youngest kept seeing areas of need and helping out as he could.

Finally the day came—Christmas. The king gave his sons each wonderful presents, and then came the time for the sons to give the king his. Prince Alexander took his father into the first room, and his father saw that the room was filled with beautiful cloth banners and hangings and carpets. The king thanked his son and went to the next room. There, Prince Benjamin had artists and sculptors create a giant statue honoring the king, a statue that reached nearly to the ceiling. The king was touched, and thanked Prince Benjamin. Finally, they went to the room Prince Christopher had been assigned to fill. Now this prince had given away almost all the money, and had improved the lives of hundreds of people in the kingdom, and the people had come to love him dearly. So with the few coins he had left, he brought a nice candle and a candle holder. The family walked into the dark room, and Christopher lit the candle. The light filled the room. “Because your wisdom is rooted in love and compassion, my son, you have won the crown,” said the king.

Over the past few weeks, different people have been lighting our Advent candles, and since last Christmas Eve, the Christ Candle, and they have been giving us a light that fills the room and fills our hearts. There are a lot brighter lights in the world—the glaring lights of casinos, the spotlights drawing us to the shopping malls, the security lights around our houses—but

none fill the room of our hearts like those little flickering Advent candles. Why? Because they remind us of the one who came to be light in our darkness. St. John didn't include a Christmas story in his gospel, but he explained Christ's coming in this way. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... What has come into 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." Isn't it wonderful how the stories of Christ's birth keep going back to that theme of light in the darkness—in Luke, angels appearing to the shepherds at night, in Matthew, the wise men following the star by night, a baby being born in the dark, dark stable?

So, in this dark time of year we who are Christians can hold fast to that light. God didn't magically erase all darkness, but God came as a light so we wouldn't be huddled in the dark alone. And this light that first shone in Bethlehem, Jesus, would grow up to tell us, "you are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Christ came to share the light of God's love, so we could light the way to others.

The light John talks about isn't a physical light; rather, it's a metaphor for the love and presence of God bringing hope and joy into our lives. Other scriptures help build on this theme. It's one thing to think of a God who created this whole vast, amazing universe, who is larger than the space that stretches on for light year after light year, and quite another to think that this God is a God of presence, a God who is with us, a God who wants to be with us.

A God so great—A God so near. And that's the wonder we celebrate especially at Christmas. We heard the words of Matthew's gospel, instructions that they should name the child Jesus, which means "one who saves," because he would be the savior of the world. He would be Emmanuel—God is with us.

St. John's gospel begins with the same words as the book of Genesis—"In the beginning." He takes us back to the moment of creation, when the Spirit of God brooded over chaos, and God's word created the universe. Then the gospel writer makes a stirring, audacious claim. This word of God—God's self expression—that created everything is the same Word that took on flesh and dwelled among us in a human—Jesus, the Christ. The Christ didn't come into existence in Bethlehem, for the Christ—God's Word was with God from the very beginning. God's nature, God's outreaching, creative love became flesh and bone, became a human being in Bethlehem. In this God-become-human, all God's grace and truth was here in our midst. And we human beings, preoccupied with the small stuff, almost missed it entirely. God offered grace upon grace, John reminds us; love; presence;

forgiveness; eternal life. Jesus was close to the Father's heart, John reminds us—that means that God loved Jesus dearly, but it also means that the attitude, the personality, the mind, the love of Jesus was an accurate reflection of the attitude, the personality, the mind, the love of God. Why did God do this? Because God wanted us to be God's children.

The Word that became flesh and dwelled among us would face death, and we would never have to face death alone again. The word that became flesh and dwelled among us rose from the dead, so that we might have life and joy eternal. Christ isn't with us in a physical sense any more, but we have the promise that Christ's presence is always with us. Baptism and communion serve as reminders of that. In baptism, we recognize that a new believer is now adopted into God's family and receives God's grace. In Holy Communion, we come to the family table to dine together, sharing bread and wine, but also sharing Christ's presence. Christ's presence isn't a physical presence in the elements themselves; but we know, we feel, we believe that when that bread is broken and shared, when that wine is poured and shared, Christ is there in our midst. What a wonderful gift! We are God's children. Christ our elder brother is with us. God is with us. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon