Christmas Eve Sermon 12/24/18

It was the Sunday before Christmas and the Sunday School teacher

          asked the little ones gathered around her: "What is Christmas?"

The children had a variety of responses:    Christmas is a happy time.

                                                                    It is Jesus' birthday.

                                                                    It is when you get presents.

A curly-headed tot wiggled her way from the back of the group to the teacher.

She boldly stood and loudly announced: "I will tell you what Christmas is!"

The teacher smiled and pulled her close,

          “Okay, Molly, tell us what Christmas is.”

"Christmas is . . . " Molly looked around and saw all the children watching her.

 Suddenly Molly went silent, stuck her thumb in her mouth,

            and shyly buried her face in the teacher's shoulder.

The teacher encouraged her: "Tell us what Christmas is."

The teacher brushed the tousled curls back from her eyes.

Finally, Molly turned back to the other children and whispered loudly,

            “Christmas is very . . . shiny!”

The older children giggled and the adults tried hard not to.

At the sound of their laughter, Molly's round brown eyes misted with tears,

           her lower lip quivering.

She buried her face again into the teacher's shoulder and the tears spilled over.

Before anyone could respond, Molly's 6-year-old brother, Jimmy,

          stood and made his way up front to the teacher and Molly.

With all the solemnity and wisdom of a sage he pronounced,

“Christmas is very shiny. It is the love of God shining through the darkness.”

A hush fell over the whole class as they heard the words of this little wise man.

Christmas was God's idea. He planned it. He decided:

              When it would happen,

              How it would happen,

             Where it would happen, and

             Why it would happen.

On the night Jesus was born in Bethlehem,

         God sent an angel to announce his arrival.

"Fear not, I bring you good news of great joy.

For in the city of David, a Savior has been born. He is Christ the Lord."

The God who created the universe,

                      and set the stars in place,

                              and the world on its axis declares:

"I love you,

              no matter who you are,

                            where you have come from,

                                            or what you have done in your life.

I love you."

God's love shines through our darkness.

Angela and Barbara were enjoying lunch at a small restaurant near their office.

It was a wet and cold January afternoon.

The sky was a dingy sheet of gloom.

Raindrops dripped from leafless branches.

Rivulets of water ran like tears down the windowpanes.

Angela let out a disappointed sigh.

"I wish it was still Christmas," she complained.

"You do?" Barbara asked, surprised.

"Yes!" Angela answered, as if she were stating the obvious.

            Didn't everybody long for the bright lights of Christmas

            at this dismal time of year?

"What is it about Christmas you love?" asked Barbara.

As she nibbled her sandwich, Angela described her favorite images: "I like

         dark nights and pretty lights,

         Santa flying across the sky,

        a pile of presents under the tree,

        cookies, and fudge, and candy canes,

        feasts and family,

        and favorite Christmas carols."

Barbara listened quietly.

As they put on their coats to return to the office in the rain, she said:

          “You know, Angela, it's our job to find the Christmas in every day.”

Angela pondered Barbara's words all afternoon.

She longed for the love and joy which is so visible at Christmastime.

She liked the feelings of love, and joy, and peace.

But Christmas isn't limited to one day a year.

Every day is a gift, with moments of love and joy for us

           to unwrap and enjoy with expectation and delight.

When she looked for Christmas in each day, most days she found it:

         In a child's laughter, in a lonely elderly woman's smile,

         in the gratitude of the hungry, or sick, or suffering,

         when offered a kind word, a warm cup of coffee, or a hot meal,

        or a helping hand.

Christmas is not limited to a day or a brief season.

Look around, and discover the Christmas of each day.

God puts no limits on his love.

Amen