

“God’s Light Came Shining”

Date: December 24, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Christmas Eve

Text: John 1:1-14

Themes: Light, aliveness, the manger scene

Do you remember how the whole biblical story begins? “In the?” And do you remember the first thing that God spoke into being? “Let there be...?” In the stories of Jesus’ birth, we celebrate a new *beginning*. We welcome the dawning of a new *light*.

A new day begins with sunrise. A new year begins with lengthening days. A new life begins with infant eyes taking in their first view of a world bathed in light. And a new era in human history began when God’s light came shining into our world through Jesus.

The fourth Gospel tells us that what came into being through Jesus was not merely a new religion, a new theology or a new set of principles or teachings. Although, all these things did indeed happen. The real point of it all, according to John was life, vitality, aliveness – and now that Jesus has come, that radiant aliveness is here to enlighten all people everywhere.

Some people don’t see it yet. Some don’t want to see it. They’ve got some shady plans they want to preserve undercover, in darkness. From pickpockets to corrupt politicians, from human traffickers to exploitive business sharks, from terrorists plotting in hidden cells to racists spreading messages of hate, they don’t welcome the light, because transparency exposes their plans and deeds for what they are: evil. So they prefer the darkness.

But others welcome the light. They receive it as a gift, and in that receiving they let God’s holy, radiant aliveness stream into their lives. They become portals of light in our world, and they start living as members of

God's family – which means they're related to all of God's creation. That relatedness is the essence of enlightenment.

But what do we mean when we say Jesus is the light? Just as a glow on the eastern horizon tells us that a long night is almost over, Jesus' birth signals the beginning of the end for the dark night of fear, hostility, violence, and greed that has descended on the world. Jesus' birth signals the start of a new day, a new way, a new understanding of what it means to be alive.

Aliveness, he will teach, is a gift available to all by God's grace. It flows not from taking but from giving, not from fear but from faith, not from conflict, but from reconciliation, not from domination but from service. It isn't found in the outward trappings of religion – rules and rituals, controversies and scruples, temples and traditions.

No, it springs up from our innermost being like a fountain of living water. It intoxicates us like the best wine ever, and so turns life from a disappointment into a banquet.

This new light of aliveness and love opens us up to rethink everything – to go back and become like little children again. Then we can rediscover the world with a fresh, childlike wonder – seeing the world in a new light, the light of Christ.

So, picture with me a silent, holy night long ago, when Luke tells us of a young and very pregnant woman and a weary man walking beside her. They had traveled more than 80 miles, a journey of several days, from Nazareth in the province of Galilee to Bethlehem in the province of Judea.

Mary went into labor, and because nobody could provide them with a normal bed in a normal house, she had to give birth in a stable. We can imagine oxen and donkeys and cattle filling the air with their sounds and scent as Mary wrapped the baby in cloth and laid him in a manger, a food

trough for the animals. On that dark night, in such a humble place, enfleshed in a tiny, vulnerable, homeless, helpless baby... God's light began to glow.

Politicians compete for the highest offices. Business tycoons scramble for a bigger and bigger piece of the pie. Armies march and scientists study, and philosophers philosophize, and preachers preach and laborers sweat. But in that silent baby, lying in that humble manger, there pulses more potential power and wisdom and grace and aliveness than all the rest of us can imagine.

To be alive in the adventure of Jesus is to kneel at the manger and gaze upon that little baby who is radiant with so much promise for our world today.

So let us light a candle for the Christ Child, for the infant Jesus, the Word made flesh. Let our hearts glow with that light that was in him, so that we become candles through which his light shines still.

Christmas is not just for one day a year. It is a process as well as an event. Your heart and mine can become the little town, the stable, the manger... even now. Let a new day, a new creation, a new you and a new me begin. Let there be light. Amen.

Let us pray.

This sermon borrows heavily from Brian McLaren's book *Seeking Aliveness*, Faith Words: Nashville TN, 2017, pp. 125-127.