

## The Light of the World

*The people who walked in darkness have seen  
a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness -  
on them light has shined...  
For a child has been born for us, a son given to us...  
-Isaiah 9:2,6*



When the days of Winter darkness are upon us it is so warming and hopeful to ponder the light of Christ that has come, is coming, and will come again into the world. The prophet Isaiah foretold it's coming, during Advent we patiently wait for it's coming, and we prepare to celebrate it's coming two thousand years ago. And, if you think that timeline is confusing, the author of the Gospel of John tells us that the "Light" has always been present in the world since the beginning of time. (John 1:1-4)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with  
God, and the Word was God. He was in the  
beginning with God. All things came into being through  
him, and without him not one thing came into being.  
What has come into being in him was life,  
and the life was the light of all people.*

Now, of course we go all out on December 24th to celebrate the coming of the light into our world with the birth of a baby in a small village in Israel, but before all that, the pagans were observing the Winter Solstice on December 21st. That day is significant because it is literally the longest night of the year and the pagans gathered to pray for the light to return...the days to lengthen...so that crops could be grown to feed the people for another year.

Christians didn't want to miss out on that celebration or the people who might be attracted to our new religion, so they absorbed this pagan holiday into their yearly cycle and they called it the day of "Darkness to Light," meaning that going forward the nights would grow shorter and the days would grow longer because that was God's plan.

But, we didn't stop there. No, our Christian ancestors recalled that Jesus once called himself "the light of the world." (John 8:12)

*...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness  
but will have the light of life.*

But, again, we didn't stop there. No, our Christian ancestors continued this theme of darkness and light...once again using Jesus' own words directed at his disciples to proclaim that we are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)

*You are the light of the world...(so) let your light shine before others, so that they may see  
your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

But, again, we didn't stop there. No, we Christians made a radically bold claim about the light brought into the world by Jesus. (John 1:5)

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.*

This entire theme of darkness to light must have been foremost on the mind of Phillip Brooks in 1868 when he wrote the words to our beloved hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" that included this line:

*"Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."*

Imagine! The hopes and fears of all the years come to a head at this one point, this turning point in the history of the cosmos. And, of all things, it's a baby! In him, in this everlasting light shining dimly from a manger, are met the collected pains, fears, tragedies, triumphs, hopes, cries, prayers, and sufferings of everyone who has ever lived. Just think about the sheer volume of that!

All of it...all of the baggage we carry, all the things we fight against, the wars and hunger, the losses and loves...it all looks toward this one singular point. This light. Like the Bethlehem star that alerted the wise men to the coming of Christ, it's a light that shines high and bright, for all the world to see.

So, as is the tradition of this Chapel we will come together this Advent season to contemplate and celebrate the light of Christ that overcomes the darkness. We begin on Thursday, December 7th, with A Service of Darkness to Light where we will worship in silence and meditate on our personal "darknesses" and give thanks to Jesus for being the light in our lives.

And, we will gather once again on Christmas Eve and rejoice that as we share the light of Christ from candle to candle, increasing the glow of peace, joy, love, and hope until our sanctuary is ablaze with the light of Christ, that we have been commissioned to join Jesus' ministry of light and life for all people.

Happy Advent,  
Pastor Paul

