

**Sermon: December 24, 2021**

**“Two Kinds of Light”**

**Written by: Rev. Jessica M. Townsley**

**Scriptures: Luke 2:1-20**

We've spent Advent talking with the kids about Christmas around the world. We've visited the traditions in the Iraq, Japan, Haiti, and today, we talked about what Christmas is like for Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem. When we think about Bethlehem, we always think of Christ, I'm sure. Of his birth and of the light from that star that shone so brightly that it guided the Magi toward the infant Jesus, but Bethlehem is, as we heard about today of course, a place alive and active with the Christmas Spirit in our time as well. The Christmas Spirit is present as people celebrate the joy of the season far and wide throughout the world—even in places where that tradition does not take on an especially religious meaning.

My closest friend's parents always hold a Winter Solstice party this time of year. She always shares photos from this event with me. It's an outdoor gathering with a few people and there's always a bonfire—lots of light. One year, she sent me a photo of the lighting of the four advent candles at this celebration. She captioned it, “Happy Solstice/Happy Advent. Mixing traditions, but whatever, it's all about the coming of the Light, right?” Now, for my best friend, who is not an especially religious person, Christmas is about family and friends. But as I read that, I thought to myself, it *is* all about the coming of the Light. Maybe Emma should have been the preacher!

Because she's right, when it comes down to it! It is all about the Light. This time of year, we feel some relief as we acknowledge our days getting longer and we feel gratitude that there will be that much more light in our lives. Today, we are gathered in community to celebrate the coming of the Light of God into the world, God made flesh in the tiny Christ child laying in the manger. Emma is right, it is all about the coming of the Light—a light brought forth by both the most extraordinary action of the still speaking God in the world and, at the same time, by the most ordinary of people in the most ordinary of ways.

As I meditated on Christmas and its meaning this year, I began thinking about how this still point in our year celebrates the most monumental pivot in the history of creation: the Almighty God deciding to come here to be among us, incarnate, in the body of this tiny babe in a manger. How ordinary this seemed from the outside: a pregnant woman and a man traveling in the night, needing a place to stay. In fact, no one pivotal in Luke's nativity re-telling is especially important. Neither the Shepherds nor Mary and Joseph were special. The shepherds were people so poor and marginalized that they literally lived like the animals they cared for. Mary was an unwed teenaged mother in a time when women, especially those who weren't from powerful families, weren't given a second thought, let alone a first. When we think about the incarnation of God in the world, the coming of the Christ child, we might wonder: why did God choose these people, in particular, to bring the light into the world and why did God choose to come to us in the form of this tiny infant in a barn?

I don't have the definitive answer to that question, but I think it has something to do with how difficult it is for human beings to relate to God. God knows how challenging it is for us to not just believe, but to hold onto that belief in the light in the face of all the things in the world trying to extinguish it. I think it has something to do with God knowing that humans sometimes need to see or to feel to believe.

We can't relate to the omnipotent, omniscient, ground of being, but we *can* relate to a mother, a baby, and some lowly shepherds, can't we? We hear about these human beings trying so hard to live into the extraordinary circumstances and we feel like, if they can through the events in this story, maybe we can get through our circumstances. And Christ's birth, as a pivotal moment in human history, reminds us of how Jesus wanted us to live and to love one another, so we try a little harder to live into that in December.

We try a little harder to love others this time of year, not just with presents, but with the gift of presence. We try a little harder to give back to our community, to see those who we usually ignore the rest of the year—to help where we can, just as Jesus did. When the Light of God came into the world, it wasn't to show off. It wasn't God saying, "LOOK WHAT I CAN DO!" It was to show us that no matter how painful our circumstances, no matter how deep into the night we feel we are, no matter how many people or things try to extinguish the Light in our lives, God is with us. God is among us. God is within us. It was to show us that the Light of the world shines forth, that nothing in this world or beyond can extinguish it. I want to remind you, whether Christmastime is an easy or hard time for you, to keep your face turned toward that light and you will never really be alone.

We came here with our carols and songs to celebrate a God who is still with us. Not just at Christmastime, but all the time. And so, our meditation this evening should not be how we will live into the Spirit of Christmas today and tomorrow, but rather, how we will live into the spirit of Christmas all year. How can we make tomorrow morning, the most special day of the year, the norm rather than the exception? Let us carry the joy we feel right now, the Spirit of Christ-mas, and the light of Christ, with us today and always.

Amen.