

*Isaiah 61:10-62:3, Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7, John 1:1-18, Psalm 147*

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels, meaning they should be viewed together. They repeat, using almost identical terms, the stories or sayings of Jesus. John, the Gospel we heard today varies in many ways from the other three.

The author of John's Gospel takes us back to the creation story of Genesis - "In the beginning..." In repeating the creation story, the author tells us that Jesus, in the form of the Word, was not created, but was a part of God, right from the start. Jesus is referred to using the same terminology used in Genesis. Jesus as God, Jesus as Life and Jesus as Light.

There is no birth narrative in John. No manger, no infant, no shepherds. There is however the very important message that Jesus was the living, breathing Word from God. He was sent to us to reveal God to us. When we read scripture during our worship we often conclude the reading by saying "The Word of the Lord." This signifies that scripture is sacred, inspired by God, but John's author reminds us that the quintessential word became flesh, like us, and lived among us.

Similar to the use of Luke's birth narrative, this prologue from John's Gospel is used every year in the lectionary for the First Sunday after Christmas. Why do you suppose the lectionary is designed that way? To year after year first repeat the story of the infant, and Mary and Joseph, then to remind us that all who receive him, who believe in his name have become children of God.

Jesus may have begun his time on earth as a totally dependent baby, but all things were made through him. He is present in all things. He is life and light itself.

In the words of Henry Nouwen "The God of love who gave us life sent his only Son to be with us at all times and in all places, so that we never have to feel lost in our struggles but always can trust that he walks with us."

I believe the message of Jesus is hope. Not a promise that there will be no hardship or sickness, that the weather will always be perfect or that there will never be disagreements, but hope that in all that we face He is with us. He is there to give us strength to face the challenges of this life, and hope that there is a better life awaiting us.

If we believe that Jesus is with us, then we too can be the light for others. Just as we did on Christmas Eve, we can offer our light to everyone around us. Passing our light to someone else, does not extinguish it. Our light remains lit to continue to help us see.

Outside these walls we can share the light of Christ by treating one another with compassion. We can look beyond the shade of differing politics and the darkness of prejudice and we can spark the light of Christ in every person we meet. Even those we disagree with, especially those we disagree with.

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estès, author of Women Who Run with the Wolves tells us “One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it.”

Today marks the final weekend of 2019. It is tempting to allow our secular calendar and lives to dictate that Christmas is over. To pack up the decorations, and discard our tree.

We will ring in a new year on Wednesday and look toward whatever the future brings for us, but I invite you to dwell a bit longer in the light of Christmas.

I encourage you to soak up the soft light of a silent night. To bathe in the essence of misty love that came to earth and dwelled among us.

I urge you to wrap yourself in the glow of that love, to allow it to penetrate into the recesses of your heart, to permit it to brighten the shadows of your soul and most importantly to spread it to each person you interact with.

This coming year will no doubt present many challenges to each of us, as individuals, as a congregation, as a nation and as citizens of the world. If we can remember to pause and pray, we can kindle that light, that love that is Jesus Christ and we can spread it to others. May it be so. Amen.