

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

January 2, 2022 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas, Year C)  
John 1:1-18  
Ephesians 1:3-14

This isn't the first time we've heard this reading from the Gospel of John. We heard it just over a week ago on Christmas Eve.

This week in Luther Seminary's God Pause Devotional, Pastor Gary Andersen wrote something that I agree with completely. This is what he wrote:

A favorite tradition throughout my ministry included reading this gospel at the close of Christmas Eve services. As the candle lighting began from my candle and then spread throughout the congregation, the sanctuary lights were gradually dimmed until completely out. At the same time, I read THESE VERSES, followed with everyone singing "Silent Night." I never got tired of it. Sure, there was a warm, cozy, sentimental feeling to it. Sure, there was recognition that the church would not be so full again until Easter. Sure, there were concerns over spilled wax or someone's hair accidentally catching fire. But what I most remember is seeing the light reflected in the glowing face of each candle bearer among a sea of other faces. It seemed as if all of us were UNMASKED for those few minutes. No matter how one came dressed, no matter their life story, ALL that FADED in the surrounding darkness. What remained were glowing faces. Faces awash in the light of Christ.

Well said Pastor Andersen.

"What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people ... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (1:3-4, 9). "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Jesus says (later in John), "I am the light of the world." On Christmas Eve, we ALSO heard the prophet Isaiah say, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." It's the kind of thing we EXPECT to hear at Christmas. We celebrate Christmas as a FESTIVAL of light. We string up twinkling lights on our trees. We illumine our houses. We burn candles in the windows. We burn up the kilowatts because Jesus Christ is born. In the bleak midwinter, why NOT shine a little LIGHT?

But, why are we reading this passage AGAIN? Why do we read it TWICE in such a short SPAN? Because we NEED to heard about the LIGHT.

Coming back to the prologue of John is a far DIFFERENT experience a mere ten days LATER. On Christmas Eve the feast is fresh and new and just beginning, but NOW the new year is PAST and the holiday is starting to "wind down." School resumes and vacations come to a close. Kids home from college will be returning to school, and leaving the nest suddenly EMPTY again. And if it hasn't happened already, it soon will: the tree taken down, the ornaments packed away; the decorations and mementos put back into their boxes, stacked again on the shelf to wait another whole year. And perhaps the post-Yuletide "blahs" are ready to set in. The joy is coming to a close, and quite a few WEEKS STILL must pass before spring, and maybe the hopes we had for a happy holiday didn't quite materialize the way we had planned.

What makes John's prologue so WELCOME THIS time around is its pairing with the opening verses of Ephesians. It says: "He CHOSE US in Christ BEFORE the foundation of the world." Here that again: "He CHOSE US ... BEFORE the foundation of the world." The ramifications of that are astounding! It means that you and I, EVERY ONE of us, have been on God's mind a long, long time, even before the foundation of the world. Even before the big bang, God knew the universe would be INCOMPLETE without YOU. It is your inheritance, your birthright with Christ. And it means that we

have a FUTURE, a HOPE. God's plan for ALL creation is bound up with who YOU are and what you are to BECOME.

Which is why John began his gospel the way he did. The first words of the Gospel are: "In the beginning..." Sound familiar? Of course it does. Those are the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth..." (1:1).

So think about that a moment. John is writing HIS version of the Jesus story, and he decides to START, not with a genealogy, but by quoting the BEGINNING of Genesis, or really, of the whole BIBLE, or REALLY, the beginning of EVERYTHING.

It would be kind of like if I wanted to write a book, and decided to begin, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" or, "A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away." Not a good idea, because I'm no Charles Dickens or George Lucas. But John DOES think he's writing a new GENESIS.

Why is John so BOLD? Because he believes that he IS, INDEED, writing a new beginning. Actually, THE new beginning. Of history. Of humanity. Of God's involvement in the creation.

John's story about Jesus is designed from beginning to end not just to tell us, but to EVOKE for us, the living, breathing promise of a new beginning to ALL of human history, IN AND THROUGH the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

Only the One who created in the beginning can RE-create. And so, Christmas is about God creating the world, and creating ALL people, and creating YOU, AGAIN. The light, coming into the world, makes ALL things new.

Let me give you an example. A writer named Steven Charleston, whom I consider to be a poet, posted these words on the internet a few years ago, just before Christmas.

The light will return.

It will come again when the darkness has grown old and self-confident,  
arrogant in its assumption of power,  
when the clash of armies seems unending  
and the voices of hope have become but a whisper.

Then the light will appear,  
in the deepest place of fear,  
least expected,

a glimmer in the hand of the poor,  
a flicker among those who refuse to FORGET HOW to love.

And the light will become brighter,  
with each one of us who turn to see it,  
warming us where our pain is greatest,  
releasing us to see one another more clearly,  
a light to follow, to cherish, to protect.

Look up now.

The season of shadows is over.

The light will return.

Isn't that beautiful? You see, Christmas is a new creation. WE are a new creation.

So Christmas may be coming to a close, but in GOD'S eyes, it's just BEGINNING. The PERFECT Christmas, full of light, and life, and truth, and grace, has only just begun. In him, YOU are a new creation.

May he create in you NEW hope and NEW strength to live INTO 2022.

"Look up now." And see the light. "A light to follow, (a light) to cherish, (a light) to protect. Look up now. The season of shadows is over. The light will return." And the NAME of this light is Jesus. Amen.