

Second Sunday after Christmas, January 3, 2021
 “Light and Life” (John 1:1-18)

This morning’s gospel reading from the first chapter of John provides for us an overture of John’s entire gospel. It is a capsule containing the thrust of John’s message: that Jesus Christ has a claim on the whole created order; that Jesus is Lord of both time and eternity.

The other three gospels show Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of God’s promise to save us. But John presents Jesus as even bigger than salvation. He is not only the savior of all people, but is the light and life of all creation.

These verses at first appear to be a very profound theological statement to be analyzed and studied, but it is really an invitation to come before the altar of the Lord and celebrate the conquest of Christ. Through Christ, John tells us, God has broken through the barrier of darkness and the light of his glory shines. Heaven has invaded earth. Life has conquered death.

When John wrote his gospel, he was faced with a dilemma. The news of Jesus was rapidly extending far beyond the Jewish communities and into the larger Greek world. How could John write about this phenomenon that originated with the Jews in a way that the Greeks would also understand? He couldn’t use terminology and concepts inherent within the Jewish culture because the Greeks simply could not grasp it. So John found a term deeply rooted within both cultures that would allow him to explain Christ in a way that all could understand. The term he chose to describe Jesus was *the Word*, or in Greek, *logos*. He meshed the two terms together and *the Word* became the power by which God gave God’s self.

Jesus is that Word, the Word who came down to earth, took on flesh, and lived among us. That Word was God coming to us in the person of the Christ Child of Bethlehem, close enough to be touched by human hands. That Word became one of us.

A frightened young soldier in Korea burst into tears and shouted, *Chaplain, pray for me! We jump off in an hour. Pray that I will come back alive.* When the soldier had calmed down a bit, the chaplain replied, *Son, I can’t offer that kind of prayer. You’re going out where grenades and bombs are exploding. Some are not going to come back, and I can’t ask God to favor you over others. But I’ll tell you what I can do. I’ll go with you.*

Now we can all imagine what it is like to be in certain situations, but we can’t really know until we’ve actually been there. But God knows what it is like to be one of us. Just as the army chaplain put himself in the midst of battle, God put himself in our place. God walked in our shoes by taking on the conditions of the human race in the person of Jesus.

As a baby, Jesus was just like us. He gurgled as he nursed, wet his diaper, and cried. Throughout his life on earth, he experienced the same things we do: joy, pain, sorrow, temptation, loneliness, love, and finally death. The act of God taking on flesh affirms that God really participates in life and death: our life, our death.

Now, it's important for us to remember that Jesus' coming to earth is not just an event that happened in the past. The Word made flesh is one of us! In Jesus, the gap between God and God's creation is bridged. God not only communicates with us, but gives God's self personally to us. We are never alone, for God makes his home in our humanity, and in him we find life.

However, John doesn't equate Jesus *with* life. Rather, he says, *in him WAS life*. By this, he means more than the fact that Jesus possesses life. Jesus has the power to *give* life. And the life that we are given, says John, is the light of all people; a light that shines in the darkness.

Imagine, if you will, a sea of darkness. Within this darkness, stands a lamp post. The illumination from the lamp post casts a perfect circle of light into this darkness. A man appears in that circle of light. With his head bowed toward the ground, he walks around shuffling his feet as if looking for something.

A policeman soon enters that circle of light. Seeing the man's behavior, he inquires if something has been lost. The man responds, *Yes, I've lost my keys and can't seem to find them*. The policeman offers to help, and the two search for the lost keys. After a while, still coming up empty-handed, the policeman, scratching his head, turns to the man and asks, *Where were you when you lost them?*

Oh, I lost them over there, replies the man, pointing into the darkness. The policeman, somewhat agitated, asks, *Well, why are looking for them here? Because*, says the man, *this is where the light is*.

Now this story may seem somewhat silly to us, but I think it makes a good point. The man knew that looking into the darkness would be futile. He recognized the power of the light, for only with the assistance of the light could he possibly find what he had lost. We, too, can turn to the light – the light that shines in the darkness, the light of Jesus Christ.

We know that our lives can sometimes seem dark and gloomy. On occasion, it's like being lost in a very dark cave. We can see nothing but pitch black all around us. We wander around aimlessly, slowly feeling our way, having no sense of direction, and struggling to make any headway at all. We become distressed, worried, frightened. (Sounds a lot like what 2020 was like for a lot of us.) But in our moment of darkest despair, when we've all but given up, a light pierces the darkness of the cave. We know the source of that light is someone who has come to help. Instantly, our feelings of sorrow, fear and self-pity are turned into joy and peace.

Our dark moments come when we're worried about our safety and the safety of our loved ones in the midst of a global pandemic. They come when we lose our job and fear we won't be able to provide for our families. They come when someone close to us dies or a once-treasured relationship is broken. They come when we or someone we love deeply is severely ill or in a life-threatening situation. But in these dark moments, a light shines. And we know the source of that light, Jesus Christ. When we turn to that light and focus on that light, we, too, can be rescued from fear, pain, loneliness, adversity, heartache, depression, and the list goes on.

John tells us that Jesus Christ is that light which enables us to know God as our loving Father, the God who can enter into our innermost being and fill us with peace and joy. Jesus is the light that can enlighten even the dark, lonely, empty corners of our lives and enable us to be true citizens of the KOG. That is truly a gift.

During the first world war, it was a custom in England for people to put a lighted candle in the window for every one of their sons who had gone into battle and had given his life. One night after evening vespers, an English father was walking home from church with his little son. As they walked, people began to place the lighted candles in their windows.

Why are they putting candles in the windows? the little boy asked his father. *Well, you see, my son, that means they have given a son into the service of the war; men who die that you might live in peace and safety.*

The boy was greatly impressed, and as little boys will, he made a game out of counting the candles. *Look, Daddy,* he cried out, *look over there. There are two candles in that window. They must have given two sons. And over there are three!*

As they walked along, they came to a vacant lot. There was no house or trees, just a big patch of evening blue sky, with the North Star shining bright and clear. The little boy jumped for joy, clapped his hands, and danced. *Look, there's a light in God's window. He, too, must have given a son.*

The introductory verses to John's gospel is a magnificent reading with which to end our Christmas celebration. Christmas began with a star in the sky, lighting the way of the shepherds and wise men to the manger in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. God had given a Son.

But John enables us to see more than the light of the Christmas star. He allows us to see the light that shines in the Christ Child. It is a light that gave itself on a cross so that you and I and all people might walk in new life. It is a light that triumphed over sin and death so that we might have eternal life. This Babe was born to die for us. He was given for the life of the world and was broken for the life of the world. No gift is greater than this!

Therefore, in every dark moment of our lives, we must look to the child in the crib and to the king on the cross, for he alone is the true light of God. He alone gives light and life. Amen.