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January 5, 2020

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas, Year A

John 1:1-18

Let us pray. Grant us, O God to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your Word, and in loving your Word to do you will, through Christ our Lord. Amen

For most of my childhood years, every Sunday the organist at our church played the tune of the song that was woven through the gospel reading today. At the time I don't think I realized there were lyrics to go with it. In fact, my brothers and I named it "The beedy beedy song" (*Beedy beedy beedy beedy bee...*) The organist played it as the acolyte put out the candles at the end of every service following the closing hymn. So, at home we "sang" the melody when we lit and put out the candles of our Advent wreath every year.

Looking back, I am sure that the organist did not choose this tune arbitrarily. As we watched the light leave the place of worship each Sunday, the congregation was meant to be reminded that the One from whom "the worlds began to be," who is "the Alpha and Omega, the source...of the things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see," was the light who gathered us into our worship that day.

The flame of the candles represented the light of Christ whose voice we heard in scripture and preaching, and whose grace we received in the sacraments. As our worship time came to a close the organist sent us out to carry that light into the world in which we lived and moved throughout the week.

This memory of worship from long ago in my life is a treasure, and yet its meaning was lost on me until I reflected on it this week. The depth and breadth of our relationship with Jesus Christ can also be lost on us as we fumble around in the shadows of the everyday demands of life.

These opening verses of the Fourth gospel are poetic and full of beautiful images that balance the awesome power of God and the intimate nature of God we know in Jesus.

In the first two readings we heard this morning we see God at work to gather people to God and to one another, and that is certainly what we experience here in worship each Sunday. But in this gospel we also see God moving toward the world, toward humanity, toward those who believe and worship the God whom we cannot see through the One who makes God known to us.

This week we had our daughter and granddaughter visiting us. Adelia is a toddler and while she was here we engaged in a kind of dance between moving toward her and allowing her to move toward us. Throughout our time together there would be moments when she would spontaneously run to me and wrap her little arms around my legs. That gave me the chance to kiss the top of her head and say, "I love you!"

And there were also times when she did not want to be with me, when only Mommy would do. But when Mommy was nearby, she felt safe to interact with others freely and playfully.

Our lives with God are sometimes like that, too. We might seek after God to share our love and joy as we do together on Sunday mornings. And other times we hold back from God, maybe because God is so big and mysterious that we don't know how to approach God comfortably.

The Fourth gospel helps us see that God created a way to come near to us that was not threatening or overpowering. Christ came into the world to bring God close to us, so that we can move out into the world with the confidence and joy that comes from having our loving God by our side wherever we go. By this relationship with Christ we have through faith, we receive power to become children of God.

Just as Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, we too are born of that same Spirit in Holy Baptism--the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and awe and wonder of the Lord, [AND] the spirit of joy in God's presence. (*paraphrase of Isaiah 11:2*)

At our baptism we were given a candle with a commission: "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (*Matthew 5:16*) As we learn to recognize the presence of God in Christ around us we, in turn, will point others to the true light, the light of God given to us in Jesus Christ.

I once worked with a pastor who would say that Jesus came to show us God's heart. That's a simple way to summarize the last paragraph of our gospel passage today.

The Word became flesh. God became incarnate, taking on the human form, just to be close to humanity. Before Jesus came into the world, God's word came through people like Moses and the prophets and John, the one who pointed the way to Christ most specifically. These gave witness to the light of God--the light that reveals the truth of what is hidden in the darkness.

It is the darkness that can keep us from drawing near to God. Even as we try to begin another new year with hope and promise of good things and positive changes, it is hard to ignore the darkness around us. Conflicts between nations, trouble in our relationships, and the inner turmoil we face in our own hearts can seem to overwhelm us.

Yet God still draws near to us. And it is this true light of God who comes alongside us, showing us a way forward and bringing us life.

Since we live on this side of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we have the advantage of being able to speak God's words as we have received them from God's own heart, from Jesus Christ, the bearer of God's grace and truth.

Perhaps the year 2020 can remind us to see God more clearly by seeking the light of Christ who came into the world to show us God's heart. Over these next several weeks in our worship readings we will see how God comes near to us again and again in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Over these next two months, I invite us all to adopt the practice of lighting a candle at some point each day as a symbol of the light of Christ that we have brought home with us from this place. We might light a candle in the morning during our devotion and prayer time. Or maybe at dinner as we return from our busy day we can talk together about how we saw the light of Christ in the world through acts of grace and love.

Then as the light is blown out, remember that the true light has not left us. The light of God lives in our own hearts, so that we might shine God's grace and love to others.

Thanks be to God. Amen

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Gathered with all who seek the Christ child, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

*A brief silence.*

Holy God, you make your presence known to the church in every land. Give to us the Word so that our work and ministry may bear the light of your love. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Generous Creator, in you all things came into being and without you not one thing exists. We praise you for the snow and rain that water the earth. Move us to care for the well-being of the work of your hands. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Savior of the nations, you gather in your care people of every time and place. Inspire the leaders of the nations to work for peace within their countries and in all the world. As conflicts around the world seem to overwhelm help us to trust in your power and grace. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Saving God, provide for your people who begin this new year in need. Grant shelter to those who are homeless, comfort to all who are lonely, and a strong sense of your presence to those who are sick. We pray especially this day for... Jessie, Kathie, Kyle, and those we name in our hearts. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Word of truth, your good news of salvation is proclaimed among us. Bless all who proclaim your word in this community, especially teachers, pastors, deacons, musicians, and lectors. Inspire us to serve as your messengers of light with the gifts you have given us. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Gracious One, your light shines in the darkness and it is not overcome. We thank you for the witnesses who have testified to your light. May their lives continue to inspire us. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Into your gracious hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your steadfast mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**