



One of the readings for Christmas Day is John 1:1-14. This is one of the most well-known and well-loved passages in the Gospels.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

Our Scriptures are full of references to God and light. Do not put your lamp under a bushel but rather hold it high so that all may see. A blind man gains sight. "Who sinned?" the Pharisees ask Jesus. "This man or his parents?" "Neither", Jesus replies. Regaining his sight is one way God is glorified. Genesis, chapter 1, verses two and three, remind us that before God began creating, it was dark. God said "let there be light" and there was light.

We lit the candles on the Advent Wreath for the previous four Sundays. Each candle represented a virtue or characteristic that we were encouraged to ponder during the days leading up to this day. Prophecy or hope in week one; preparation in week two; the Shepherd Candle or joy in week three; and the Angel Candle or love last Sunday. A visible reminder that we await both the celebration of the birth of Jesus as human in a manger in Bethlehem even as we await the second coming of Jesus in glory. Both/and. The light cast by the candles grew each week as we lit additional candles.

Brother Curtis Almquist of the Society of St. John the Evangelist suggests that today

is an answer to prayer, and the prayer is God's own. **We** are an answer to God's prayer. **We** are God's messengers to bring about the peace and goodwill on earth, and with justice, and provision, and the dignity of love. That we not just believe in the Christ but that we bear the Christ to a world dying to know the very things promised of the Messiah. **We are the Christmas gift.** What is God's calling on your own life just now? Why is it that you've been given breath for yet another day, yet another season, except to be an answer to God's own prayer for justice, and peace, and provision for this world that God so loves.

What would it mean that we here are an answer to God's prayer for justice and peace on this earth, for a sense of God's provision, for all to know the dignity of love from God? ... I suspect for most of us ... this day invites us to small, faithful responses to God. It seems to me that we can take both solace and inspiration in how we celebrate God's coming to us at Christmas in the face and form [of] Jesus. We say that the birth of Jesus is "good news," but it is small good news. Jesus is a baby. If you will pardon the pun, today invites our taking baby steps, our bearing the Christ of justice and peace, provision and love first and foremostly to those who are near: our relatives and friends, our neighbors, our co-workers, the people who are obliged to wait on us in stores and restaurants, along toll roads, in hospitals and at service stations, the people standing on our street corners.... **We are the Christmas gift to them...** if not in big ways, then in small, faithful ways.¹

Yes, Jesus is the light of the world (Jn. 8:12). Jesus, though, came to light us to be the light of the world after his death and ascension into heaven. Remember last night when the greeters lit the candles of the persons sitting at the center aisle and then that person lit the candle of the person next to them and so on until every person in every pew had a lit candle? That is the message that Jesus gives to us today. He lights us and calls on us to light the person next to us, and that person to light the person next to them. And so on and so on and so on, until the end of time when Christ will come again in glory.

You are the Christmas gift to God and God to you and you to your neighbor. Do not be afraid. For the light of Christ is a light that will never go out and the darkness will never overcome it. **Amen.**

¹ Br. Curtis Almquist found at <http://ssje.org/ssje/2004/12/24/refract-jesus/> (Dec 24 2014)