

Christmas 1  
December 30-31  
St. John's Cathedral,

It's always interesting to see what happens the day after Christmas. Christmas music disappears from the airwaves. (I know because I asked Alexa to play some!) The wrapping paper and boxes are in the recycling, the tree is drying out, everything in the stores in on sale –especially the Christmas decorations, and life turns back to ordinary things.

Except in the Church. We're not finished with this great celebration quite yet and the Christmas season goes on until next Saturday. There are more carols to sing, more scripture to hear, more time to ponder and pray about the incredible story of Jesus coming among us as a little baby – coming among us as one of us. Something we call the incarnation. God becoming human.

On Christmas Eve we heard the same story that we acted out in the Christmas pageant the week before of Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus lying in a manger. The angels, the shepherds, the animals – the whole story told from ground level.

Today we hear the story from another angle and in more poetic language for sure. John's gospel gives us a different view of this holy event. If Luke's version were like a home video of the manger scene, John's view is more like that of a satellite camera, giving us a more cosmic view – a wider angle for sure.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God," John begins. The Word (the second person of the Trinity who later we come to

know as Jesus) has existed forever and at this point – the time we call Christmas—became human and lived among us. He has taken on flesh.

Why? Because the world needs the light that he brought to us. In Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this in the Message, he writes, “What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn’t put it out.”

Later in his paraphrase, he writes, “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.”

That’s certainly a fresh way of describing something that is already familiar to us. A way of telling the story that focuses us on the light that Jesus brought into the world through his birth, his life and ministry and ultimately his resurrection.

The light is so important in this account, no matter what translation we read. The light blazing in the darkness that is Jesus, coming among us. Our collect today focuses us on that light and how the light impacts us directly and calls us to share it:

“Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives...” In other words, it’s not just our duty, but our honor to bear this light as we go about our lives. In a sense, we reflect this Christ-light in the way we live every day.

Some of you may remember our stewardship effort this year with the theme, “Bearers of Light,” and the art from John August Swanson that accompanied it – a painting of huge group of people, carrying lighted candles, and streaming down from

the hills. That painting has always moved me – made me more conscious of this sense of bearing the Christ-light not only as individuals but as a community of faith.

And for some reason, this painting also brings to mind many who have both brought that light into my life and taught me how to share it. I think, for instance, of Polly McMahon, known to many of you, who died just a few weeks ago. Polly brought light and joy to so many as a teacher, a mentor and a friend. She had the gift of deep, empathetic listening. She was generous to a fault. She knew how to bring out the best in people no matter where she met them. She emanated love and acceptance. She was a woman of deep faith. This is a way that light is lived out. A way that Polly was a bearer of light.

Another of my light-bearers was Jeff Terry, our former bishop, who died in 1999. Jeff chose to be a missionary in the Philippines after his ordination, a choice that gave him and his family an amazing global perspective. He loved the people among whom he served. He truly understood ministry as a call to be a servant and went about his work as a bishop with humility and joy. With that background it was natural that he shared the light with many.

You might think of those who have been light-bearers for you as you have gone about your faith journey. And you might also think about the ways that you share the light in your family, your professional life, your neighborhood, wherever you are.

The fourteenth century theologian and mystic Meister Eckert, looks at what I'm calling our opportunity to be a bearer of light as a call to be mothers of God. That may

sound a little strange to you (if not a daunting job). What he means by that is that is that the birth of Jesus continues to take place within us.

He writes, "What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us."

Of course we sing this in a familiar carol by Phillips Brooks, "O Little Town of Bethlehem. "O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today."

Be born in us. Call us to share the light. Both of those describe how we live as people who are the hands and feet of Christ in today's world. People of the incarnation.

Howard Thurman catches the spirit of this in his poem,

The work of Christmas.

*When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.*

We're surrounded today by that holy Christ light and have yet another opportunity to celebrate its radiance and power. In a few minutes we will baptize Charlotte Rose, who will become a bearer of the light. It's no coincidence that after someone is baptized we light a candle and hand it to them with the words, "The light of Christ." Even if she is a bit too young to hold this candle now, the light is hers to share for her whole life.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.