

## Christmas 2

*Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ*

*January 4, 2008*

John 1:1-18

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Today's Gospel lesson is one very familiar to many of us. In fact, I'm sure that there are many of you who could recite, by heart, the opening lines of this passage.

Throughout this passage, the writer of the Gospel of John uses three very important images: Word, Light, and Life. I'd like for us today to take a closer look at these images, beginning with The Word.

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With the first three words of his Gospel – “In the beginning” – the writer of John transports us all the way back in history. As we hear these three words, we are reminded of the very first chapter of the Bible, the first chapter of Genesis. He invites us to consider the power and greatness of the One who created the universe and inhabits every square inch. Let's briefly consider the vastness of this creation.

At the speed of light, 186,000 miles a second, sunlight takes eight minutes to reach the earth. That same light takes five more hours to reach the farthest planet in our solar system, Pluto. After leaving our solar system, that same sunlight must travel for four years and four months to reach the next star in the universe. That's a distance of 25 trillion miles. To get a feel for the distance of one light year, if you drove your car at 55 miles per hour, it would take you over 12 million years to travel one light year.

The sun resides in the Milky Way Galaxy, which is shaped like a saucer with a bulge in the center. Our sun is roughly 3/4 of the way to the edge of the galaxy. To get a feel for

that distance, if our solar system were one inch across, the distance to the center of the Milky Way Galaxy would be 379 miles. Our galaxy contains hundreds of billions of stars. Yet the Milky Way is but one of roughly one trillion galaxies in the universe.

Astronomers estimate that the distance across the universe is roughly 40 billion light years; there are roughly 100 billion trillion stars. And the Lord Almighty is the Creator of it all.

As the account of creation in Genesis tells us, God began creation with a word – or, more precisely, four words: “Let there be light.” God spoke these words, and it was so. God continues speaking creation into existence until this perfect creation was complete. Our God is a god who speaks. God speaks, and things happen. Psalm 33 says, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.”

We all know there is power in the spoken word. But the most powerful words of all come from our God, the Creator of all things.

In today’s Gospel we learn that The Word, who is Jesus Christ, was there at the very beginning of our history. The Word was with God, and was God. The Word was an active participant in creation, for “all things came into being through him.” As God, The Word acted to bring the perfect creation into reality.

All of the universe, which God created perfectly, was soon corrupted by sin. Nothing that humanity could do could save us from the death-grip of sin.

But our God is a merciful God. God loves us beyond all measure and reason. As our Gospel writer tells us, God chose to actively enter into our sinful world. God is not a god who creates, then sits idly by watching history take its course.

And how did God choose to enter our fallen world? God didn't simply speak words this time – he sent The Word, Jesus Christ. The Word who was there at the very beginning of creation. The Word through whom all creation took place. The Word who has the power to restore a fallen, sinful creation to its intended state of perfection.

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Secondly, our Gospel writer speaks of Jesus as the light, the light which “shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” It may be hard for us to imagine such an all-pervasive light, but it's not so hard for us to imagine overwhelming darkness.

Imagine, for instance, the darkness of a cave. Have any of you ever been on a cave tour, where at one point in the tour they turn out all the lights? Have you ever experienced such darkness where you couldn't even see your own hand in front of your face?

A few years ago John Mark and I went hiking in the Smoky Mountains. One of the trails we'd decided to go on lay just at the end of what's called “the Road to Nowhere.” This was a road which was started by the Federal government several decades ago. It was designed to go across the southern end of the mountain ridge, connecting North Carolina to Tennessee. This unfinished road in North Carolina is now only a few miles long, and ends in a 1,200-foot-long tunnel.

To get to the hiking trail, we had to go through the tunnel. This didn't seem like anything extraordinary. It was a bright Spring day, and from one end of the tunnel we could easily see the bright sunlight shining down at the far end.

However, as we neared the middle of the tunnel, we quickly realized the enveloping darkness. It quickly became so dark, I couldn't see my own hand in front of my face unless I was facing directly toward one end of the tunnel. I realized that there could be someone – or worse, some *thing*, maybe a bear – standing right next to me, and I wouldn't even know it.

Before I even knew what was happening, I felt one of the worst fear I've ever felt in my life. My natural instinct was to run, RUN as fast as I could, to the other end of the tunnel – toward the light.

But I soon found that my fears were calmed, so long as I kept my eyes on that light at the end of the tunnel. I was able to deliberately and steadily put one foot in front of the other, if I kept my eyes on the light.

Now, I feel certain that our Gospel writer is using darkness as a metaphor – he doesn't actually mean darkness as in the absence of light. But the sort of darkness he envisions are the threats we face in our lives, particularly the threat of sin. This is the reality of sin, even though we can't see it. It is an all-enveloping darkness which threatens to smother us with its power. Sin is darkness. The power of Jesus Christ as the light of the world is so great that not even the greatest darkness – the greatest sin – can overcome his light.

Perhaps this is a key for us today. Something we need to remember. The key is to keep our eyes on the light as we face the various forms that darkness may take in our own lives. The threat of terrorism and war, and personal distresses, such as unemployment, the loss of a loved one, troubles at home. The key is to keep our eyes on the light, who is Jesus Christ. By doing this, we can receive courage, strength, and hope to endure through whatever darkness may exist in this world.

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The third image our Gospel writer uses to talk about Jesus is life. We know that The Word was present at the very beginning of life. The Word was an active participant in creation. But having fallen from a state of perfection, that same creation was sentenced to death, not life as God had intended. It took The Word, the light which darkness could not overcome, coming into the world to overturn that death sentence.

But what's more, our Gospel writer tells us that the coming of The Word into the world as Jesus Christ has the power to redeem all of creation. That entire universe I described earlier will be restored to its intended state of perfection through that same Jesus Christ, who will restore you and me as the perfect creation God intended. This is the life that The Word offers to all of us. All who know Jesus Christ, who receive him and believe in his name, have the power to become children of God.

In your baptism God claimed you as his own child. The light, Jesus Christ, which has come into the world, has the power to overcome all darkness, and to re-create you as a child of God.

But baptism is not a one-time event. We are reminded to return to our baptisms every day, to experience anew the grace and forgiveness which God offers freely and abundantly. We are invited to experience life, as completely forgiven and loved children of God.

And as a child of God, you are then called to move out, in faith, to act on this grace you have been given. The baptismal liturgy reminds us to “let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

I ask you, if you have not already made a new year’s resolution, to make one. Or even if you have, make another resolution. I would ask you to prayerfully consider how you might let this light that has come into our world, Jesus Christ, shine before others.

What can you do, today, that will let this light shine before others, so that they may see that you are a new creation in Christ Jesus? So that they, too, may be led to newness of life in Christ Jesus? So that they might experience the grace upon grace that you have been granted through The Word which has come into our world?

It may be something as simple as a warm smile to the person who checks out your groceries at the grocery store. It might be letting another car in front of you in traffic, with a smile and a friendly wave. It might be inviting a friend, neighbor, or co-worker to come to church with you next Sunday.

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Tuesday is Epiphany. It's a special day in our church year. Epiphany is a Greek word meaning "appearance" or "coming into light." During this season of Epiphany, let us celebrate the fact that the light, Jesus Christ, has come into our world to bring us into the light and out of the fear of darkness. Let us help spread that revelation of Jesus Christ to others. Let us help to spread that word that the love and grace of God is readily available to all.

Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Amen.

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