

Sermon: “Do We Have It Backwards?”

Olivet Congregational Church, UCC

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Christmas Day

Scripture

John 1: 1-14

The Gospel According to John

The Word Became Flesh

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.

Sermon: “Do We Have It Backwards?”

My mother has particularly enjoyed Christmas lights this year. She gets excited whenever she is able to go out and see them. It was wonderful to see her enjoy white lights in the shapes of angels, all sorts of animals, a train, and snowflakes at a park in Meriden; lights strung on trees and bushes in yards; lights wrapped around lamp posts; Christmas tree lights or the light of individual candles shining through house windows. These lights have brought her joy. Me too. I imagine that we all find joy in the lights that we see this time of year.

We celebrate Christmas with **Light** – lights on trees, in windows, on homes, in yards and on lamp posts or street lights in centers of towns. We spend time setting up those **lights** in the days or even weeks before Christmas. And on Christmas Eve they all shine. Did you notice them last night? Were they especially beautiful?

And on Christmas day, in John's gospel, we hear

“In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was God. And the Word was with God.” We are reminded that, in the beginning, Jesus was the Word with God saying, “Let there be light.” And the sun and the moon and the stars appeared in the sky. Jesus was there, as the sun and the moon and the stars lit up the sky – shining light, glowing light, and twinkling light- dispelling the darkness.

Have you noticed the beauty of the night sky lately? When I bring my dog outside at night before going to bed, the stars seem to pop out at me. I even recognize Orion and the Big Dipper. Their **light** stands out in the dark sky.

Jesus, who we celebrate as an infant in the manger; the **Word**, our **God** who created light at the beginning of Creation, is born to be **Light** for all people.

John tells us “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.” And on your bulletin covers, you see a prism emanating from Jesus. Light in all its colors radiating. Beautiful light. Jesus, the light.

Last night, Christmas Eve, in a sanctuary **lit** by candles, we sang Silent Night. We sang of the radiance of Jesus our Lord – “Radiance streams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.”

The infant Jesus, our God and our brother, radiated light to those who were blessed to look upon him. That infant laying in a manger, was a source of light – of love and hope to be shared with others.

Do you think Jesus glowed? I do. I believe that the infant Jesus had a glow about him.

Did you realize that when we speak of moments of joy, we infuse them with words that we associate with light.

We say the bride was **radiant**.

Or we talk about the **twinkle** in the old man's eye.

Or we notice that the proud father **glowed** when talking about how his daughter was just accepted into her desired college.

Or the mother's face **glowed** with pride as her sons played the violin and cello at our Christmas Eve service, which added to the already special music of that sacred occasion.

Or maybe we see the people glowing in those heart-warming stories on the news. I'm thinking of the face of a woman giving out toys to kids who would not otherwise have toys at Christmas. Her face **glowed**.

I recall the news story of a nurse and a special needs young man who was in need of open heart surgery. That young adult needed a guardian, someone who was willing to care for him after surgery, in order for him to have his heart operation. This nurse met him prior to his surgery and wanted to help him. She stepped up to plate and became his legal guardian, so that he could have that lifesaving operation. She made him part of her family. The love that was shared and has grown between this nurse and this young man **lit up** their faces.

The shepherds who saw that baby Jesus in a manger had followed the **light** of a star to find Jesus. And when they saw that newborn infant in that manger, were moved by his **radiance** or by the **light** in his eyes? I believe that that **Jesus' light** went straight to their hearts. And filled with **Jesus' light**, the shepherds glowed when they left that stable. And **they shared that light** when they announced Jesus' birth. They couldn't stop themselves from spreading the **light of God**. The **light** that lived in the infant Jesus now lived in them. **Jesus' light** had become a part of them. **It radiated from them**.

Sometimes I think we have it backwards this time of year. We sing lots of carols and we **light all sorts of lights** as we prepare for Jesus' birth.

Then we are ready to stop singing carols and take down the Christmas tree and **the lights** on New Year's Day. Jesus has just been born, **the light** has just come into the world, and we are ready to stop celebrating. Is it because we're exhausted? Is it because we don't feel **filled with the light and joy** of the infant?

What if we were more like the shepherds? They followed a star – a **light in the distance**- to find Jesus. Then after seeing Jesus, they were energized and filled with joy. **Jesus' light filled them with light.**

What if we were more like the shepherds? **What if we keep singing of the joy of Jesus' birth – of angels and shepherds and stars, and love?**

What if we keep the **Christmas lights** burning in our homes just a little bit longer – to remind the world that Jesus was born and lives on in the **light** that overcomes darkness.

And what if we share **the light of Christ** with our lives after we take down the Christmas lights.

Ann Weems puts it this way in her poem, "Later."

Later, after the angels.

after the stable,

after the Child,

they went back...

as we always must,

back to the world that doesn't understand

our talk of angels and stars

and especially not the Child.

We go back complaining that it doesn't last.

They went back singing praises to God!

We do have to go back,

But we can still sing the alleluias!

On this Christmas Day, may you be blessed
to hear angels joyfully singing in your souls,
to know the radiance of the Christ Child,
to feel the light of Christ alive in your hearts – filling you and emanating from you-
and may you bring that light into whatever dark places you encounter in our
world because

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

The darkness will not overcome it!

And we are called to share it!

Let there be light!