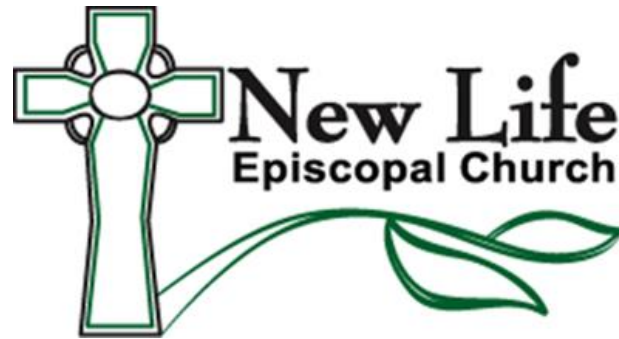


A Sermon for the 1st Sunday after Christmas

December 29, 2024



Rev. Barbara Bond

New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

Click Here for today's Readings:

[www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/christmas-1/y after Christmas – The Episcopal Church](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/christmas-1/y%20after%20Christmas%20-%20The%20Episcopal%20Church)

John 1:1-18

The Light of Christ

Have you ever been lost in the dark? I mean, literally, where there is little light and things are kind of scary? Norm and I experienced this scenario this past week. We were on a mission of mercy to someone in need on the day after Christmas, traveling 200 miles into Darkest Pennsylvania! – near Altoona. The trip east took four hours, we did our pastoral visitation for about four hours, and then we started the four-hour westward return trip. Around 6 pm we were still in Darkest Pennsylvania, trying to follow the advice of our GPS navigator, who continually told us, “Turn left in 1000 feet. Turn left! Now! Oh shucks, recalculating...” We missed the turns because we could barely see. We were out in a rural area, the streets were barely paved, and the only lights were the occasional Christmas lighting displays. It was really dark. We were a bit scared. Eventually, we came to something familiar and well-lit, and we came home to a welcoming cat. We were glad to see her too.

That is literal darkness. Then there is figurative darkness, darkness as metaphor, and it can be pretty frightening too. To name just a few examples: the darkness of war, the darkness of illness and depression, the darkness of loss and grieving, the darkness of loss of faith, the darkness of addiction, the darkness of meaninglessness.

The writer of the fourth Gospel – we call him St. John – understood darkness in all its meanings. Isaiah had spoken of the people who walked in darkness who saw a great light. John says that this light, this promise of God, was God incarnate, God made flesh, who came to us as Jesus. John tells us that Jesus was with God from the beginning of all time, that Jesus was also known as the Word of God. Let’s listen again to those beautiful poetic words that begin John’s Gospel:

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.

We have been singing *O Come O Come Emmanuel* all through Advent. And he is come: *Joy to the world, the Lord IS come.*

There are lots of ways to enjoy light, such as fireworks, shining decorations, and the light of dawn, as our seasonal darkness begins to ebb and daylight comes a little earlier each day. For us church folk, we celebrate an entire liturgical season about light, called Epiphany, when each Sunday sheds a little more light on who Jesus really is. It begins with the visit of the Magi, who know who the child is and were led to him by the light of a

star. The first Sunday in Advent celebrates the baptism of Jesus, when he himself found out who he was, God declaring from the heavens that “This is my son, the Beloved.” Throughout the season, there are more and more disclosures of the identity and mission of Jesus, ending with his Transfiguration on the holy mountaintop, when God assures Jesus (and us) that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets, and Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem.

We are invited to make this transformative journey ourselves. We come to this place each week to hear the Word of God, to hear about the epiphany stories, to hear the disclosure more and more, as light comes into our understanding. In this place, we join with others on this journey, and our community is bound in love and care of one another. We may come in out of our own darkness, but the love of God and community will dispel the darkness through our worship, our care of one another, and our care for those outside our doors.

All of our music this morning speaks to this transformation through light. We began with *Joy to the World, the Lord is come*. Our sequence hymn spoke of the Word of God *cleaving the darkness*. Our communion hymn is an ancient expression declaring “*the Light of Light descendeth ... as the darkness clears away*.” And our final hymn praises the light in glory: *How bright appears the morning star*.” These beautiful texts and music surround us with glorious sound and familiar expression.

John’s Gospel declaration rings true to us:

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.

Thanks be to God.