

This is the mystery of Christ's coming: That from the beginning of time the Word was of God, with God, and was God. God broke in, became flesh, came to dwell among us. John's gospel gives us a frame in which to hold our image of God — and that frame is Light. Light that came to abide with us, that shines brightly, that brings dispels the dark and which darkness cannot overcome.

I especially like that last part — *which darkness cannot overcome*, because it gives me hope, and it speak into something greater than our present moment :

~ the possibility of peace: for our families, our communities, our nation, and on earth.

~ and of hope and promise: for when hope is lost, when we lose our imagination.

We lose our “lightness of being”.

But God’s light has come to save and restore us. God’s inbreaking in Christ touches a primal place within, the place where our longing for God resides. It awakens our souls and helps us to have the courage to go on, to hold out for miracles, especially when facing adversity, when the forces of the world seem to close in on us.

Throughout the world, Christians gather on Christmas to recall Jesus’ birth, to set our hearts and minds upon this good news and the light it shines into the darkness of our world. We beckon the light of Christ into this holy space and as we raise our voices in song, the light of Christ is reflected in us, shining forth all our hopes and dreams: those of our ancestors who came before us and those we hold for the generations to

come. In Christ's light, the true light, our souls are illuminated.

Each year in December, sometime around Christmas, our Jewish siblings celebrate Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights. Perhaps it is not so ironic that in a season of shorter days and more darkness both Christians and Jews gather to behold the healing and hopeful light of God, to find strength and renewal in its warmth and illumination. Collectively, we hold sacred the light that casts away our darkness.

As we await our Lord's coming, we light one Advent candle each week, culminating with the lighting of our Christ Candle, at the center, on Christmas. It is on Christmas that we celebrate

the light of the world, who has come to illuminate our darkness!

Similarly, Hanukkah commences with the lighting of one candle, and moves gradually to the lighting of eight. The temple in Jerusalem in the 2nd century was rededicated after a small group of rebels, led by the Maccabees, liberated it from occupation. And it was there that a very small amount of oil was discovered, sufficient to light the menorah, but which miraculously burned not just for a day, but for eight days and nights.

Inside of our sacred traditions of celebration and remembrance, lies a shared hope, and a shared desire for the light of God to be shown upon us. We all are called to shine God's light, to share the love of God in thought, word and in deed.

Last night in our sanctuary, as we sang Silent night illuminated by the light of our glowing candles, words from my favorite Hanukkah song, “We are Lights”, written by Stephen Schwartz of Godspell and Wicked fame, came to mind.

A row of burning candles shines light upon
your face,

taking you and me and all of us, to a far
off holy place,

But the blazing of the candles is not the only
light,

look at all of us, shining here tonight?

We are lights. Lights of memory.

Remembering times long gone.

We are glowing, growing miracles.

We are lights. Shining on and on.

By God's grace, we live and move and have our being. Our God, made manifest in Christ: God from God, Light from Light, the true light which enlightens everyone, came into the world that we might believe, be filled and sustained. He came to shine his light into our hearts, that we might be Christ's light in the world that shines on and on.

This Christmas, let us honor our Jewish siblings, as they cherish their sacred memory and the miracle of God's abiding presence in their lives.

And Let us celebrate and cherish our sacred memory — the mystery and miracle of the Word made flesh, and his abiding presence in our lives. May we bask in the shining light of hope, healing and grace he brings and continue to shine our lights brightly.

Christmas Morn - 2024
John 1:1-14

Sermon: The Rev. Laurel Coote