



The Rev. Anthony Estes, Associate Rector
Christmas Eve
December 24, 2020

Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14
Psalm: 96
Gospel: Luke 2:1-20

When I was a young child, I would go from place to place in the City of Detroit to recite James Weldon Johnson's, *The Creation*.

And although it has been several years since I had to recite that poem, there are a couple of phrases that stick out in my mind. And I recall this evening, particularly the way that Johnson describes the state of the world before the light was created. He said it was, "*Blacker than a thousand midnights, down in a cypress swamp...that darkness covered everything.*"

Darkness.

Darkness is a state of the world that unfortunately a lot of us have become more familiar with this year than perhaps before...that we have encountered and been confronted by our fears and our anxieties and our worries.

And for the most part, we have found a way to survive. With mask mandates and abbreviated gatherings with family over the holidays, and the adoption of new technology, we've made do.

We have learned how to:

Walk in darkness,
Dwell in darkness, and
Live in darkness.

It's kind of like the residents in the northernmost parts of Alaska where darkness persists for about two months. The earth's axis, I read on the internet, has tilted away from the sun, leaving that part of Alaska dark...and...life goes on, and they make do.

But...

As the Creator of the stars of night would have it —and in due time — the axis of the earth tilts back toward the great star that brings light and life to the world.

As the Creator of the stars of night would have it, the prophet Isaiah, thousands and thousands of years ago, spoke to the people of Israel in our lesson from Isaiah Chapter 9 and says, *“Those of you who have sat in darkness, those of you who have found a way to make do, those of you who have found a way to survive in darkness, take courage and take hope and take joy because light is coming...great, marvelous, wonderful light!”*

It is the welcome word when half spent the night is.

It is a welcome word to those who are sick and tired of being sick and tired of being sick and tired.

It is a welcome word to those who look at empty chairs and empty beds and empty bowls.

Light is coming.

What has been is not what will always be.

And that though our physical location might not change, that message changes us on the inside.

We begin to hope again.

We begin to hold our bellies and make room for the child that Isaiah prophecies will come...unto us.

For those living in darkness, a child will be born. He shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Everlasting Father.

We understand this child to be none other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the savior of all humankind!

The One who is not like us, though is just like us.

The One who closes the distance between the Creator of the stars of night and the rest of creation.

The One who knows what it is to live in darkness, to have his light snatched and snuffed out and yet have his flame burn again.

That is the hope, that is the message of Christmas...that if you are experiencing profound darkness, you have a reason to hope and to take courage, to love and to live again, because something is happening for you:

Jesus.

He has come once. And he will come again.

And when he shows up at the half-way point of life's darkest night, he brings light with him, he brings hope with him, he brings peace with him, he brings joy with him. It is a Merry Christmas.

Because the hope that we look forward does not come from politicians or potentates. It comes from the all-powerful Son of God, Jesus Christ.

May you find the way that Christ is with you.

May you find the ways that the Holy has come amongst you to lift your burden and to bring light and laughter and love.

May this be the best Christmas you have ever had.

May you know that these are the last hours of night, the last hours of darkness ...and that the daybreak is upon is.