

5:00 Christmas Eve SJTL

The Rev. David T. Anderson

*The point is this: **there is still wondrous activity going on**, by God, and we cannot make Christmas ourselves. Rather, we wait for it in hope and we will see evidences of the child who is the Light of the World, the glory of God with us.*

On this wondrous night when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the child whose life and death and resurrection changed the world forever by what prophets and gospel writers and poets call the “light” that shone through him. We gather in churches filled with holy light that we might come into the very night when Jesus was born, across the years of time and the miles of distance. **We gather so that we might catch a glimpse, a real genuine sense of Jesus, the Christ who is the light of the world.**

I want to invite you into this light, into seeing with your own heart if not eyes, the light of this child this holy night. I invite you to approach this light, with heart and mind, and use this “accidental” occurrence to be helpful in doing so!

It was before the service, and I gathered everyone who was helping in the service in the library. For those of us who “lead” worship, it is important that we prepare ourselves in an interior-self way. I thought it would be helpful for us to focus on quieting down, slowing down, and opening ourselves in a way that could help us feel God’s presence.

So I brought a candle into the library and set it on the glass coffee table that our seats were gathered around, and invited everyone into a few minutes of silence as I lit the candle. [Lights in church go off; preacher lights the candle.]

It did not begin immediately, but as we remained quiet and focused on the candle, it began to happen. See if it will happen for you, now. Look at the flame, quietly. Now squint your eyes almost shut, but not fully, and keep focusing on the flame.

As I did this that night, as I watched the flame, its light went further and further into the room.

I squinted softly enough just a bit to play with the light in my eyes.

Pretty soon I was startled with wonder to see that there were tiny threads of golden light – light and delicate, but clear and bright - coming from the flame directly to me! It made me smile; I was not near enough to it to feel its warmth on my skin, but its glow was surely warming me just the same. It was so neat, and becoming spectacular! I counted the beams coming to me: sometimes 6, then 10, then 4, then a dozen I bet – changing, maybe a little fragile, but beautiful and glorious, yet gentle too: light!!

Can you see it coming from this candle? If you can’t see this one well, take your time. Keep still. Perhaps the threads of light are just going up or down or both. Maybe what you see is more like a fireworks exploding in all directions. Simply see it.

To me, in that place, as we gathered with a purpose to open ourselves to God's presence with us, **those threads felt like beams of God's light, pointers to the reality of God's love.** It made me smile; but not just that. It filled me with a sense of grace upon me, a certainty of God loving me in that very instance with a substance we call love, but gosh, what an inadequate word! Because it so limits what fills the soul with comfort and joy, with peace that is beyond understanding and compassion that just wants to reach out to the one next to you and embrace them with what you know would be weird looking loving and good will!

And I looked around me **at the others in the room! They too had the beams upon them!!!!** Oh my God how could I not think about you Light and you Love going directly to the heart, the eyes, the mind, the soul of everyone gathered in His name! Stupid, silly me – and what a joy that spread. It finally made sense to me what I have heard for years and years and years: that God love me – but how can he loves every “me” that exists – surely we are all loved but no one is special. But the message is that you **ARE** special – the favored one – but so is the one beside us, and the one beside them, and so on and so on until that light shines upon all creation and all human beings.

I sneaked another look at the candle there were even more delightful surprises!! Its beams were heading not just horizontally to we gathered, but now I perceived as well those beams shooting up and down like firework rockets that shoot straight up into the sky in a straight line gradually dissolving in the darkness but leaving traces of light upon the darkness.

Oh holy night of Jesus' birth! Glories beam from heaven afar. We do not make Christmas; we receive it. Christmas is not over in a day, or even a season. For this light is the light of the world, forever and forever. Such a light the world has never seen! It brightens the lives of a **humble mother and dutiful father, of simple shepherds and traveling wisemen, then into the world it continued** to sinners and those blind and struggling, to men and women and boys and girls of old, to the apostles and bishops and those who prayed as the Church to behold and become vessels of this Love from generation to generation – and now to us here and at this time, this Son is born over and over in our hearts.

The invitation is before us, to gaze upon that light, that love, and to go even unto a manger that is often quite distant from the normal routes of our journey. At that place, I/you know that I am called to a place of innocence. That is the place Jesus comes into the world to be with us.

At that place, he makes his home, and asks me to make mine.

At that place, I am loved and well held.

At that place, I do not have to be afraid.

At that place, I am swaddled in God's loving embrace.

Will I choose to make such a place, such innocence my home – to create a manger for his bed, with me?

May we come to the quiet, the peace, the watchful yearning, of this Love being born in us. (If in your heart, by Anna Hernandez, arr. Dan Moriarity)

O Savior Light – grant us the calmness of faith to see thy radiant beams, and to place our lives, our hearts and minds, our fears, loneliness, and tears, our families and friends and strangers on our way in the brightness of this light, and to so behold and bear this light into the darkness, that as that mere candle spoke in a library, we too mirror delight in your goodness and power and glory! Amen.