

12.25.2022 Christmas Day
Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-14

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

“Reflect His Glory”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The gospel text for Christmas Day is taken from the first chapter of John’s gospel, a text describing Christ as the *Logos*, the Word of God. Between verses one and fourteen, John describes the Word creating the cosmos, giving life and light to humanity, and in Jesus, becoming human, full of grace and truth. John’s gospel gives the big picture of the incarnation of God’s creative Word in Jesus Christ.

John’s gospel begins, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” With one of the most profound opening paragraphs in scripture, John reveals the mystery of God to us – Jesus is the invisible God made visible in our flesh. John describes Christ as the creative Word dwelling in our humanity, “*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.*” The message of Christmas is the Word dwelling in Jesus, who shares his life and light with us.

Jesus, the life and light of creation, was born of Mary. John’s words – “*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people*” – announce Christ as light in the darkness for all people. To say it another way, Jesus must also be cradled in the manger of our hearts to live in this world. Christmas is not about something that happened only once long ago; it is about a Savior who was raised from the dead and lives today for you. The creative Word, Jesus Christ, will dwell in you, recreating you in God’s image and radiating the life and light of Christ outward to others.

Perhaps you have met someone who always seems to radiate life and light from somewhere within them. When my wife and I served as missionaries in Japan, we had a friend named Ruby. Ruby radiated the life and light of Christ by living for others. Ruby was a mother and an educator, and as a member of the church we attended, she also worked with compassion for the hungry and homeless of Tokyo, her adopted home. She brought light and hope into the lives of many who lived in the darkness of hunger and loneliness. I mention Ruby on Christmas Day, because I know that Jesus lived in her, giving life and light to all whom she encountered.

For Ruby, to be a Christian was about reflecting the glory of a Savior who lived in her each and every day, so that every day was – if I dare say it – like Christmas. The Word, Jesus Christ, had

become flesh in Ruby, full of grace and truth. This is what Jesus Christ promises to do for each of us throughout our lives.

Ruby would be embarrassed by my describing her in this way. She would probably have said to me, “I’m just doing what Christians are supposed to do for others.” With meekness and courage, Ruby radiated the compassion of Christ by gathering offerings to provide food and other daily necessities for the homeless. Ruby also gathered people to go to public parks in Tokyo, distributing food and daily necessities to those in need.

When I was with Ruby, I always felt as if I was standing in Christ’s light. After Ruby died from cancer, her funeral was held in the chapel of the Lutheran seminary in Tokyo, filled to standing room only with people from many different nations. By acting upon Christ’s call, Ruby’s compassion and pureness of heart had touched many people. Christmas is about the birth of a Savior who shares our humanity. In Jesus Christ, God has – we might say – “some skin in the game.” This is what John describes as, “*The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.*”

Today’s reading from Hebrews encourages us that Christ “*sustains all things by his powerful word.*” The Word made flesh will sustain you; Christ will dwell in you full of grace and truth so that you might radiate and reflect his glory outward in all that you do.

This season of the year is one of light, yet we don’t often talk about why we decorate with lights. They are a symbol of hope in the world’s darkness. John writes, “*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.*” One person like Ruby can offer light in the world’s darkness to others. Christmas is not really about the lights on the tree; it is about the light of Christ in your heart radiating the light of hope outward.

There is a painting by a Dutch artist named Gerard van Honthorst that I first encountered in college, titled *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1622). The painting depicts the moment at night that the shepherds saw the baby Jesus in the stable. The only source of light in the painting radiates outward from the Christ-child. The painting is a depiction of Jesus as the light of the world. The reading from Hebrews describes Christ in this way: “*He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.*” And this is my point, if Jesus dwells in you, you will reflect his light and his very being, outward. Your light may be the only light in the room.

Many years ago, I had the good fortune to work with a man named Dick Nelson. Dick told me the story of having traveled a great distance at night in a driving rainstorm to get to a meeting in

which a church was making hard decision with the synod about whether to remain open or not. Dick said that because of the weather, he wondered if he should not have turned around and just gone home. Nevertheless, he continued and arrived. The meeting was nearly over, and Dick said he felt like a failure, for he had gotten there late, and wasn't really able to contribute to the discussion. Afterwards, someone came up to him and said, "Thank you for being here. Your support and presence helped us make the decision to continue." Dick said, "But I didn't do anything." The other person said, "You traveled here to show support of God's work in this place, and thanks to you and others, God's work will continue here."

Reflecting the light of Christ in our lives is like traveling at night in a storm in order to offer someone the light of hope. This is what Christmas is really all about: a God who comes to us amidst the storms of our lives, in our distress and darkness, offering the hope of life and light. Whether you actively serve like Ruby or whether you are simply present with others in their distress, Christ's light will illumine the darkness around you. That's the funny thing about Christ's light, we aren't always aware of what Christ is doing through us, but others will see your light in the darkness.

At Christmas, open your heart to him again. Reflect his glory.

Jesus is born so that his life and light might live through you.

Allow him a place in your heart.

He will share his grace and truth through you.

A blessed Christmas to you all. Amen.