

## Christmas Day Year B11      John 1:1-18

I left our service last evening and had a wonderful dinner at the Jordans. From there I made my way to the church where I have my membership, and worshipped with those I have come to know these past few years. I travelled back to the house at half past midnight, the quiet of the streets a delight after the crazy traffic during the days leading up to today.

One of the delights of doing so much travelling after dark is being able to see lights decorating the houses I pass. Some folk go WAY overboard, but others are quite tasteful, all are different and unique. I have my favorite style of light and what I like to see in the way of decorations; I would imagine you do, too. And I know which houses put up lights, when and which ones don't. All the usual lights were on last night, or should I say, this morning?

But one thing I know as sure as I am standing here is that some of those lights won't be turned on tonight, just as some trees will make their way to the curb for pick-up tomorrow. I remember one year, I was returning home from going to a movie. It was December 26<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup>, and I noticed that some of the lights on the houses were dark – outside, but not in.

And, then, in a row of houses that had lit up the night with their brightness just a couple of days before, but were now dark, I saw a fir tree in the side yard of a house at the end of the block. It was covered with those big old light bulbs that I had as a kid. They were colored bright blue, red, green, white, and yellow and gave off a powerful light. I was reminded of the passage from John's gospel: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Today is Christmas Day; the first day of the Christmas Season, of the twelve days of Christmas. You know, "on the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me," and so forth. While some of us have exchanged gifts and most of the packages have been opened, this part of the Christmas season tends to be a quieter time. As we move past the frantic crush and push of the shopping season, we are given another opportunity to be reminded what is at the heart of our celebration.

Today's gospel is taken from the prologue to the Gospel According to John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This is where John's gospel begins--in the beginning. This is John's nativity story; it is not with shepherds and angels or a babe wrapped in cloths lying in a manger. In this nativity story, this Christmas story, John takes us back to the beginning. He echoes the words from the book of Genesis: In the beginning God created; God moved over the chaos and darkness and said, "Let there be light." In John's gospel, from the very beginning was the Word. The God who moved over the face of the deep, over the darkness, who spoke and said "let there be light;" this same God became flesh and blood and dwelt among us. John says, "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."

The God who takes on our flesh does not ignore the darkness but shines in the very midst of it.

Since Thanksgiving, the shopping malls have been telling us that "It's the most wonderful time of the year." For many it is a mixed bag. Christmas isn't what it was when I was a child and never will be again. I'm an adult and a pastor; it is different; it just is. You know what I mean, I'm sure. In this economically difficult time, many have lost jobs or seen their investments and securities dwindle--unsure of what the future holds. Perhaps we have not been able to do what we might have liked to have done for Christmas. Many serve in harm's way and are not with family this Christmas. There are those living with illness or with grief at the death of a loved

one--sorrow intensified during this season of memories of Christmas pasts and there are those with high, perhaps unrealistic, expectations of what Christmas is supposed to be. There might be those who are just as happy to have the celebration done with and over.

During these twelve days of Christmas amidst all the things that pull at us, we are reminded, called back to where our center is to be located, where our hearts belong--to celebrate the mystery of God becoming flesh and blood, and to joyously receive the coming of Christ among us, the Word made flesh, the Word that gives life and breath and hope to us all, for in and through Jesus, we are shown how we are meant to be, full of life, full of hope, full of joy, allowing this light to shine forth in our lives in the midst of whatever life is throwing at us at the moment.

In this season of gift giving and all that pulls and tugs on our hearts, may we remember all the good gifts that the Creator has given us, the sun and the moon, this good earth with all its blessings of sky and water, plants and animals, this incredible gift of life, of breath and memory, this day, this moment, and all those who are a part of our lives, both joy and sorrow, and all that it means for us to be fully human, fully alive. May we remember to be a blessing to others as we show God's love in what we do and say. And, above all, may we remember the gift of the Word made flesh sent to save us, to heal us, to bring us joy, to bring us back to God's own self. For God so loved the world...

Let us pray...

God of light, incarnate word, in Jesus Christ, the babe in the manger, you came to be with us. Help us to feel your presence and to see your light amidst the darkness. Bless us this holy day and throughout the coming year with the confidence that comes from knowing your company and with vision for seeing beyond the shadows to vistas of hope, holy hope. Amen.