

First Sunday after Christmas

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. 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.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

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. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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May only Gods word be spoken, may only Gods word be heard – Amen.

First thing I'd like to do this morning is give everyone a chance to catch their breath. Been a busy stretch of time, hasn't it? Christmas Eve, then Christmas, and of course it is STILL Christmas – Now New Year's Eve then it's New Year's Day. I don't know about you, but I had a couple of times this week I honestly forgot what day of the week it was! Do it again, deep breath, and enjoy this moment while you can. It's been busy, and we are just getting started.

Even before we unpack this Gospel a bit, think about how appropriate this one is for the time! It's a new year – a new time in the church – a new time in your relationship with God and with each other, and we are offered "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"

In the beginning was the word. We are in a beginning now – what's your word? What note would you like to begin this new year on? Let's see – Love – trust – compassion – keep it simple and direct. Sharing – openness - Love keeps coming up for me. The Gospel offers that

the word was with God and he word is God. Was the word you chose “with” God? Maybe the word **is** God – not a bad place to start the year!

The Gospel continues – “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people”. Maybe the word is God, especially if all things came into being through him. What would you like to have come into being this year?

Maybe God is the place to start, or maybe the word Light, as the Gospel continues, “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.” But what has come into being is life – and we are told this light and life can be the same. There is strength in light, and there is strength in life. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” So we see that the darkness wants to overcome life and light, but it can’t.

“Life was the light of all people.” So we walk with God, we walk with light and life, and the darkness will not overcome us. This does not make the darkness gone – its’s still out there. We have all experienced it in different ways and different times. It is up to us to decide how we bring the light. We have been provided with a number of tools to bring light into the darkness.

I did a funeral yesterday to assist another priest. I will usually meet with the family in a circumstance like this to hear about their loss, and to learn of the person who is being memorialized. When I met with this family, I honestly don’t think I have met with a family in a circumstance like this where there was more laughter and light. I heard stories and memories, and saw the loved ones of this man delight in their memories.

Don’t misunderstand me - there were tears, too. But the light of their joy in remembering is what took the moment. God was present in remembering this life. The light was there, and life was present, too, as it should be.

Think for a moment about times of darkness in your life. Where did the light come in for you? Think about a time you have known of someone else in darkness. Did you bring them light? If we can believe “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”, then we know that darkness is not and cannot be permanent. It all changes, even as the seasons do. In todays world where it seems to get dark enough to be bedtime at about lunch time – we know the light will return - Maybe not all at once, but it inevitably gets there! In the parts we see as the darker parts of day to day life, the light will return - Maybe not all at once, but it inevitably gets there! As the theologian Thomas Fuller once offered ““It is always darkest just before the day dawns.”

This Gospel is, in itself, such a blessing, because it gives us a sort of condensed, almost bite-sized story of our Lord.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

John came to testify to the light – he knows the light is there, he knows it is coming, and in testifying to it, helps spread that light to a world not knowing what is coming,

“He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”

He was born “not of the blood and will of the flesh” but born of God. “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” This life was light to the people “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.” So the light took life in the word through our Lord Jesus Christ – and now lives in the world through us, who carry Christ’s light in our own hearts into the world.

The light lives in us as we go through our day – through our work – through the people we meet and contact day to day. The way we live and move and share this light is, in the end, up to us.

The Gospel of Matthew offers “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

But at the same time, it is up to us. If you want to keep it under a bowl, go for it - but in my opinion, you will find the light does not give you much benefit that way either. Don’t want to share it? Then don’t – the choice is yours. A candle alone still keeps out the darkness, but that light becomes very lonely for more life and light!

But how glorious is the life of the light of many candles all together! Think of the way this sanctuary looked with everyone’s candles lit on Christmas Eve as we sang “Silent Night.” That was the light we speak of today. The light we are meant to share and carry in our hearts – carry in our hearts to share with others whose candles may have sputtered and fizzled a bit. To share with others who may be in darkness of their own. To light the way for those who have lost their way.

Maybe light will be my word for this new year – and I wish you a new year of carrying that light always, being a light for yourself and sharing that light with others on the path.

Amen