

Sermon for January 3, 2015
John 1:1-20

In today's Gospel reading we hear John's Christmas story. Now some of you are probably thinking to yourselves, but wait Pastor Sue there aren't any angels or a baby or shepherds or a manger, so how can this be a Christmas story? While this version doesn't answer where or how or who; it does answer an important question—what difference does it make that God has become human and lived among us.

We have in verse 5 the promise that, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." This not only is stating a fact that light is stronger than darkness, but it is also a promise giving us hope that no matter what is going on in the world and in our lives; the light will continue to shine.

This promise so accurately describes our life of faith. We know that light is stronger than darkness, that love is stronger than hate, and that life is stronger than death even when looking out at the world would beg us to think differently. But believing in that promise doesn't mean that our lives will be without struggles; it just means that we know we don't go through them alone and that there is something better waiting for us on the other side because this Christmas story is a concrete expression of God's love for us.

We also learn from this Christmas story that, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made God known." That which we long for especially in our times of greatest need, we cannot see; whether it be illnesses, deaths of loved ones, depression, job loss or any one of many other challenges we face—we can't see God.

Knowing our limitations God condescended to become one of us; that which was infinite and invulnerable became finite and vulnerable for us. God says to us look at my Son and see who I am. In Jesus we see a God who heals, who forgives, who embraces outcasts, and prays for those who hurt him. In Jesus we see a God who understands betrayal and denial, suffering and pain, humiliation and death. And because we have seen God in Jesus we can live with hope as well as share that hope with others.

Christmas is the shortest season in the church year—only 14 days. Advent has 4 weeks, Lent has 6 weeks, Easter has 7 weeks and Pentecost has half of the year and I wish that Christmas would last longer. But maybe that is why we need to hear these verses today on the last Sunday of Christmas—to remind us that Christmas is more than just a season; it's a way of life. Christmas isn't over when we get to Epiphany; it's just extended in a new way. The hope that is renewed in us and the promises given to us at Christmas are now revealed to the rest of the world during Epiphany.

This Christmas story reminds us that God decided to become one of us, to take on our pain and suffering so that we might have hope. God decided to become mortal so that we might enjoy God's eternal life. This is more than just a season; it's a promise that requires our active participation every day of the year. God becoming human glorifies everything that we are and that we do. Our lives matter to God and our well being is of the utmost importance to our heavenly Father. Everything that we are and that we do God is eager to share with us. God longs to equip and empower us to share our worries and challenges along with

our joys and our hopes with each other—a community of believers filled with hope for each other and for the world.

I end today's sermon with a poem written by Howard Thurman, "The Work of Christmas."

"When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart."