

The Light of All People
John 1:1-18; Jeremiah 31:7-14
Christmas 2

Jeremiah 31:7-14

⁷For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, “Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel.”

⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.

⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.” ¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. ¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And 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...

¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The Sermon

In the beginning, darkness covered the face of the deep. It was the same darkness of which Isaiah spoke when he said, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

In the primordial darkness and chaos, the earth was a formless void. The *ruah* of God—the wind, the breath, the spirit of God, moved over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light.

Into the absence and emptiness, into nothingness, into a world that couldn't care less, came the God who is ever-present: who cares intimately and passionately about your well-being (and your neighbor's), and has a compelling interest in your decision of whether to share the abundance, of which God knows that you are only a steward.

The light shines in the darkness (present tense), and the darkness did not overcome it.

In other words, even the forced, public, politicized, unjust and appalling termination of the earthly life of Jesus could not and did not overcome the permanence of his light.

The Greek word for "light" is *phos*, as in photograph, photosynthesis.

It's the same word that, according to Matthew (17), was the light that was seen by the disciples who were with Jesus when he was transfigured, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became "dazzling white"—his clothing became *leuka os to phos*: white as the light.

It is the same light that, according to Luke, shined on Saul as he was approaching Damascus, when a light from heaven flashed around him.

The beginning of John's good news is this:

The light of love, of presence, of hope and care and compassion,

took everything that the darkness could possibly throw at it—
the loneliness

and the isolation

and the devaluing of human life,

the mockery of goodness,

the cynical manipulations and political machinations—

and still the light shines (present tense) in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

We have a Creator of infinite beauty
and demanding, incisive, and overwhelming truth,
whose Advent defines the universe and every order of life within it;

whose nativity brings us into direct encounter
with the eternal God,
—on this earth, in a human body, in our history—
the same Creator who is present in your room right now,
who made every atom in your body billions of years ago,
and conceived of you, personally, long before then.

And Jesus' message when he walked on the earth revealed the
astonishing will of God *for* this world:

Love one another.

Turn the other cheek.

Feed my lambs.

Tend my sheep.

Forgive not seven but seventy-seven times.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love your enemies.

Feed my sheep.

The ability we have in our human hands—just like Jesus' hands—
to testify to God's presence
to embody God's love
to enlighten and illuminate
and bring light into dark places of cruelty and apathy
is indescribably powerful.

It is a bright, shining light.

It is fed on the bread of heaven

It is the Word of God.

It is the God who is love.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, is coming into the world.

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