

GOD IS LIGHT
 (or, "Do You Ever Feel As If You
 Are Walking Around in the Dark?")
 John 1:1-18
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JOHN 1:1-18 (NRSV)

- 1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
 2 *He was in the beginning with God.*
 3 *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*
What has come into being
 4 *in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*
 5 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*
 6 *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*
 7 *He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.*
 8 *He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.*
 9 *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*
 10 *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.*
 11 *He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.*
 12 *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,*
 13 *who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*
 14 *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.*
 15 *(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.'")*
 16 *From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*
 17 *The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*
 18 *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.*

The year 2008 ended in great suffering. In addition to the senseless killing in the Middle East, the financial tragedy in the United States and other places in the world has caused many people to lose their houses and their jobs and their retirement programs. The year 2008 ended in great suffering.

I want to tell you something that is going to brighten **your New Year, 2009.**

GOD IS LIGHT.

l-i-g-h-t

GOD IS LIGHT.

It may well be true to say that LIGHT was the first thing which primitive men and women ever worshiped. Perhaps the LIGHT was the sun. Perhaps it was a streak of lightning. Perhaps it was a flame of fire.

In the mind of the writer of the fourth Gospel, the conception of Jesus as the LIGHT is fervently pursued.

“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (verse 9)

In reality, this was no new thought to the Jews. For in the Old Testament there are many references such as this one from the book of Psalms:

“The Lord is my light and salvation.” (Psalm 27:1; NRSV)

Or, in the prophecy of Isaiah:

*“The sun shall be no more your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night;
but the Lord shall be your everlasting light...”*
(Isaiah 60:19; NRSV)

So, it was no new thought to the Jews when the writer of the fourth Gospel wrote:

“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (verse 9)

In the passage which I have read to you, the gospel-writer John introduces us to the cousin of Jesus who came to be called “John the Baptizer.”

*“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.”*
(John 1:6-8; NRSV)

And then comes that message for us who look ahead into 2009:

“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (verse 9)

The remainder of today’s passage in John deals with one of the experiences of John the Baptist as the herald of the Light. However, rather than go over John the Baptist’s story which is familiar to most of us, this morning I want us to center our thoughts upon the LIGHT whom John heralded.

ONE OF THE QUESTIONS FOR OUR 2009 PREPARATION IS THIS:

Do you believe that Jesus was the Light about whom the fourth Gospel speaks?

It is the age-old question of **“What are you going to do with Jesus?”** **“Who do you think Jesus is?”**

The Bible and the Church contend that Jesus is God in the flesh. Or, in the terminology of the fourth Gospel, Jesus is the Word become flesh.

So, listen to this:

*“...to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God; who were born,
not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will
of man, but of God.”*

(John 1:12-13; NRSV)

Do you believe that the Light about whom the fourth Gospel speaks is Jesus...the One who gives us our relationships as Children of God?

Later, in chapter 8, the fourth Gospel records Jesus Himself as saying:

*“I am the light of the world; whoever follows me
will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”*

(John 8:12; NRSV)

ONE OF THE QUESTIONS FOR OUR 2009 PREPARATION IS THIS:

Do you believe that Jesus was the Light about whom the fourth Gospel speaks?

A SECOND QUESTION FOR OUR 2009 PREPARATION IS THIS:

If you claim to be a follower of Jesus, how are you going to show it?

The story has it that the captain of the ship was very egotistical and big-headed as he commanded his first voyage. The pitch-blackness of the night was further made more hazardous by an all-enveloping fog. Suddenly the darkness was pierced by a bright light directly in front of the ship. The captain ordered his radio man to instruct the approaching vessel to change its course 15 degrees in its starboard direction.

The radio operator sent the message only to return with an answer instructing the captain to change his ship's direction 15 degrees to its starboard. Outraged and furious at having his command questioned, the captain had the following message sent:

*“My name is George Brown, and I am the Captain of this ship.
Change your direction 15 degrees to your starboard!”*

The reply was not long in coming:

*“My name is Phillip Jones, and I am a Seaman-recruit.
I am also the Keeper of this Lighthouse.
Change YOUR direction 15 degrees to your starboard!”*

A SECOND QUESTION FOR OUR 2009 PREPARATION IS THIS:

If you claim to be a follower of Jesus, how are you going to show it?

Are you willing to change the direction of your life?

Jesus said:

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

(Matthew 5:14-16; NRSV)

John Cheever has a story entitled “*Christmas Is a Sad Season for the Poor.*” It centers around **Charlie Leary**, an elevator operator in a high-rise apartment building in New York City. Cheever describes Charlie Leary this way: “*Charlie was a prisoner, confined eight hours a day to a six-by-eight elevator cage, which was confined, in turn, to a sixteen-story elevator shaft.*”

A major part of the story simply involves Charlie Leary’s encounters with the well-off people who live in his building while Charlie has to work on Christmas Day. Before the story gets involved in other directions, it is interesting that the encounters that Charlie has with the well-off people who live in his building are centered in their telling him, “*Merry Christmas, Charlie.*”

The story reminded me of a picture I saw one time of an overweight Christian missionary patting a starving African child on the head and telling the child: “*God bless you!*”

A SECOND QUESTION FOR OUR 2009 PREPARATION IS THIS:

If you claim to be a follower of Jesus, how are you going to show it?

Take (1) that story of the “*Merry Christmas, Charlie*” encounters, and (2) that picture of the “*God bless you*” encounter with the starving child, and contrast both with these words from Roman Catholic Bishop Kenneth E. Untener:

Consider this fantasy. The bishop’s representative is making his annual visitation to a parish. He checks the baptismal register, the marriage register, and the rest. This is fairly routine. Then he takes out an important-looking form with only two questions on it, and says, “Now, the main part of my report. What percentage of gross income does the parish spend on the needy and suffering---in the parish and outside the parish, deserving and undeserving?” Then he takes notes. He turns the page for the next question. “As for the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, imprisoned---how are we parishioners involved in regular outreach to such people on behalf of the parish? Are more than 50 percent of them [**the church members – jtr**] involved?” Then he writes this information down. These two questions become the heart of his parish report. Now we’re talking bottom-line stuff.

Back to the original question: How does the church get ready for the Lord’s coming? Not by scrambling to include some efforts for the poor among all the other things we are doing. Rather, by recognizing his [**the Lord’s – jtr**] special presence in the needy and suffering, just as truly as we recognize his special presence in the pregnant, young, poor girl named Mary. Having recognized this, we act accordingly.

There is no other way, says the Lord, to get ready.

(*The National Catholic Reporter*, Volume #21, #8, December 14, 1984, pp.1,2)

A SECOND QUESTION FOR OUR 2009 PREPARATION IS THIS:

If you claim to be a follower of Jesus, how are you going to show it?

Are you willing to pray heartily for people suffering from the “financial tragedy of 2008”?

Are you willing to express your faith in God by going on behalf of Jesus to visit someone who is suffering from the financial tragedy of 2008?

Lutheran Pastor Alfred Klausler writes:

“There is a beautiful custom observed in a small English church. Beside every family pew is a tall candle. As the family enters the pew for the evening service, the candle is lit. Naturally, the more families present, the more light there is in the church.” (Klausler, Alfred, 90 Meditations for Youth, St.Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1959, p. 64)

Surely a preacher does not have to spell out the implications involved in today’s passage.

Surely we all understand what Jesus meant when Jesus told his followers that they should not hide their candles underneath a basket. Have you ever sung this old gospel song?

*This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!
God said, “Let your light so shine!”*

*Hide it under a bushel, No! I’m gonna let it shine.
Hide it under a bushel, No! I’m gonna let it shine.
Hide it under a bushel, No! I’m gonna let it shine.
God said, “Let your light so shine!”*

*All ‘round Winthrop campus, I’m gonna let it shine.
All ‘round Winthrop campus, I’m gonna let it shine.
All ‘round Winthrop campus, I’m gonna let it shine.
God said, “Let your light so shine!”*

*All around our city, I’m gonna let it shine.
All around our city, I’m gonna let it shine.
All around our city, I’m gonna let it shine.
God said, “Let your light so shine!”*