

People of the Christ Light  
Christmas Meditation  
12.24.18  
Xmas Eve C  
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St. Charles Ave. Baptist Church

I love a symbol. I love a marking moment. I love a reason to light candles. I've been known to wave some incense from time to time. And so, I love the gifts that comes with each shift in season; particularly when the physical seasons in the world align with our liturgical ones in the church. That means the confluence of marking the winter solstice on Friday, witnessing a gorgeous full moon on Saturday, and then crossing the threshold into the Christmas season tonight is, for me, rich with metaphor and meaning. Everything is changing and shifting. The light is shining in darkness, literally. Symbolic seasons, like this one right now, are invitations for the imagination to play and consider what real life transformation might look like. Give yourself to metaphor for just a few moments.

In the depth of late Autumn and early Winter, we know rationally that the 4 p.m. darkness is temporary. We remember the 9 p.m. sunsets of Summer, but by this time of year, the pressure builds in our bodies as though Spring and Summer may not come again. We despair looking outside our office windows at an afternoon dusk. I begin to universalize the dark: This is just my life now. Dark at 4:30. Only seeing my children once a day during daylight hours. It is particularly easy to despair in darkness, so to mark the night when we know the light will begin to return is a glorious thing.

It has been another year of darkness, hasn't it? Our Christmas offering here at St. Charles is inviting us to stand with our faces staring into the void of fear and suffering as we consider the real-time consequences of poverty and forced migration at our Southern border. No pretending that a head-in-the-sand, holly, jolly Christmas is a realistic goal. The local, national, and global stories of suffering are real. We know them. We are naming them. We are reaching out, holding these stories in our hearts, and hoping our best collective effort at awareness and healing will spark light into the void.

We'll gather back here at this same time next week for a special service I'm calling "The Longest Year" to reflect on the personal, private ways we have experienced darkness in 2018. Know that space will be held for you here that night because some of you might be carrying an extra portion after this week. For some of you, this

Christmas week is personally hard and not especially joyful. If you feel I am speaking to you, I know that you know all too well how darkness is not just a metaphor but a place in your spirit, a place in your mind. Me, too.

And so we hold that darkness without judgment and without fear. We know suffering in our own lives. There is tremendous suffering in our world. This is real. And yet tonight, as the sun sinks below the horizon, we lean into this Christ candle before us and grab a spark to share with one another. And, quite literally, that Christ Light will spread around us as we sing together, "all is calm, all is bright."

As we welcome the Christ Light tonight, I hope we can acknowledge that light shining in darkness is not always what we hope it will be because it allows us to see what has been hidden and tucked away in shadows. Light shining in darkness has a spotlight effect and shows what we'd prefer not to face or own about our lives and world and secret self. Remember, when the shepherds first saw the light, they were afraid. We are, after all, celebrating the birth of a child who grows up to be a radical truth-teller, who calls people out on their inconsistencies and challenges them to rise to a higher way of living, who challenges the powers and principalities of our world even though it will cost him his life. Light shining in darkness can be terrifying,

Nevertheless, the angels bring comfort and assure us, right alongside the shepherds, don't be afraid. I've got good news that will bring such joy to your life: The Christ has been born. This is the news we celebrate tonight. Where is the Christ light emerging (being born) today, now, in our time, in our lives? If we are brave enough to believe it, the answer is: the Christ Light is emerging right here and now in your life, in my life, in the space between us, in our capacity to carry it and bear it out in the darkness of our lives and our world.

The brilliant preacher and faith leader, Rev. Jacqui Lewis, pastor of the historic Middle Church in Manhattan, asks, "What if the most fundamental aspect of our identity is that we are each anointed and appointed by The Holy One, by Spirit—to preach good news to the poor, liberty to the captive, and sight to the blind? What if we take seriously being the body of the Christ—that we are the hands, feet, and heartbeat of the Living God? What if we are Word made flesh, Love made flesh, Light made flesh?"

The good news of Christmas is that God comes to earth in human form, God with us, Emanuel. The good news of our lives is that God is waiting to come to earth again and again through us. We will walk out into the darkness in just a few moments. We will pass the spark of the Christ candle around and sing into the night, "Radiant beams from thy holy face! Christ the savior is born!" What would it mean to understand your

participation in this story is to live as Word made flesh, Love made flesh, Light made flesh? How might your Christmas (and new year and life forevermore) be changed by understanding yourselves to be people of the Christ Light?

The story we celebrate isn't about a baby born some millennia ago, left to coo sweetly into the silent night. The story we celebrate is about a God waiting to be born again and again into our stories, into our world, into our imaginations and awareness. As we read from the prophet Isaiah earlier, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." When the light dawns, you can't go back to walking in darkness anymore. May tonight mark a shift in your awareness, a spark in your imagination, an increase in your ability to face your darkness and the world's. May you welcome the Christ Light like Light made flesh, Love made flesh, Word made flesh through you.

I can think of no better invitation to this way of living than the one from the beloved Clarissa Pinkola Estes who famously writes, "One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires, causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of the soul in shadowy times like these—to be fierce and to show mercy to others; both are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity."

Do not be afraid, my friends. May you go from this place ready to give yourselves to Word, to Love, to Light. Amen.