



*Rev. Chris Taylor - 12.24.19*

*"Children of Light"*

*Ephesians 5:6-14*

There is something about the light that draws us. I was thinking about that the other night when I looked in on my grand-daughter sleeping in Bonnie's study. I noticed the night light placed near her bed, and the soft, warm glow it cast throughout the room.

Lily is two and a half years old, and here she was in a room that she had never seen before. I wondered what it was like for her to lie there in her cot and look at everything around her in that unfamiliar place – the easy chair and footrest, the book shelves and file cabinets and pictures on the walls. It would be a bit disconcerting, this shift from her own home to a place that was altogether new and different. Was she anxious? Afraid? I remembered my own uneasiness the first time I stayed at my grandmother's in Essex Fells, NJ.

But for Lily there was the night-light nearby, and I'm sure there was comfort in its glow: helping her see and make sense of her surroundings; pushing back against the darkness; pushing back against those fears that sometimes come with what we cannot see. There is something about light that feeds our soul.

This is what the Apostle was getting at when he wrote in the great prologue to his gospel: "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."

What exactly happened in that stable two thousand years ago? We know a child was born. We know his name was Jesus, and we know that he was the son of Joseph and Mary. There is just too much historical evidence to doubt any of that today. Where it gets a bit murkier is when we consider his nature: was this really God incarnate as Christians have claimed down through the centuries? Was this really God in the form of human flesh?

Of course, there is no way to prove it one way or the other. People have been arguing the incarnation ever since; trying to explain it, trying to prove or disprove the very possibility of it. Ultimately, there is no proof – no way to establish the truth beyond a shadow of a doubt. No, the best we can do is make a choice: the choice to believe in the incarnation or not.

That's the nature of faith. It is not the same as knowledge. It is a bit like swinging back and forth on a trapeze, high above the ground, wondering if your partner is really able to catch you. If you've never done it before, you can't know for sure. Your every instinct will be to hang on because there is a light riding on the answer to that question. But there is (finally) only one way to find out for sure: you have to let go. Only then will you really find out whether your partner can catch you or not.

That's the difference between knowledge and faith. With science, first you experience and then you believe. With faith it is the other way around. Like swinging on the trapeze, first you have to make the choice to believe and act upon it, and only then will the experience follow.

Ask those who have made the choice to embrace Jesus – I mean not just saying the right words but making the choice and acting upon it (letting go and risking all!) – ask them, and what they will tell you is that the experience that followed made all the difference. They will talk about how it changed their lives. Maybe it was freedom from an addiction that had plagued them for decades; or an experience of the transcendent that infused their lives with meaning; or maybe they will talk about a marriage saved, or a catastrophe avoided, or an experience of a peace unlike anything they've ever known before, or finding a life that was richer and fuller and more beautiful than they had ever imagined possible... the experiences they share will be as different as each of those people is unique. But there will be this one constant: the difference that faith has made in their lives.

So perhaps our call on this night of nights is not to try to explain what happened two thousand years ago but simply to live into the mystery of it all; to accept it in the same way my grand-daughter accepts the reality of that soft light that fills her room at night. God incarnate, God breaking into this world – the very Kingdom of God rending that veil that stands between us and eternity and becoming present in the form of this infant lying in a manger. Fully God and fully human. The very idea of it boggles the mind.

The Apostle doesn't try to explain it in his prologue. What he offers is simply a description: this is what it means (he is saying); this is what it's all about – light coming into our world and revealing the contours of our existence, light showing us what matters and what doesn't matter at all, light suffusing our lives with comfort and meaning and hope.

Like that light that fills my grand-daughter's room, this is a light that helps us see this world in a different way; see it as it really is. It is a light that pushes back against the darkness and offers a glimpse of that which lies at the very center of our existence – a glimpse of God's heart, of God's very essence. There in the child lying in a manger what we meet is boundless love; a love from which not even our sin can separate us; a love that is reaching out to us even now.

That's what it means to be children of light: recognizing that we are the creatures and not the Creator and so making the choice to bow down and worship this One who is so much greater than ourselves; realizing that the greatest joy in this life lies not in how much we accumulate or how high we climb, but sharing this love that has come to us in Jesus – learning to love others as God loves us.

So on this night I invite you to embrace the mystery and open your lives to the light. Take the step of faith, and as you do may the light and joy of our Savior's birth fill your lives with meaning and hope, this day and forevermore.