

ISAIAH 60:1-3 & JOHN 1:1-14

THERE IS A STORY FROM 2007, ABOUT A WORLD FAMOUS VIOLINIST WHO ONE NIGHT, PLAYED A FREE CONCERT, INCOGNITO OUTSIDE THE METRO STATION IN WASHINGTON D.C.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT IN THE 45 MINUTES HE PLAYED ABOUT 1,000 PEOPLE PASSED BY HIM, BUT ONLY SEVEN STOPPED TO LISTEN TO THE MAN FOR WHOM CONCERT TICKETS RAN AROUND- \$200 MINIMUM.

THIS CONCERT HE DID ILLUSTRATES THE FACT THAT OFTEN PEOPLE ARE SO BUSY OR FOCUSED ON BUSINESS OR PLEASURE THAT THEY FAIL TO EXPERIENCE BLESSINGS GOD PROVIDES.

THE NEW TESTAMENT SEEKS TO OPEN OUR EYES AND MINDS AND HEARTS TO THE TRUTH THAT GOD LOVES US AND BLESSES US.

BUT SO OFTEN WE CAN MISS THESE BLESSINGS IF WE DO NOT SEEK TO BE OPEN TO THEM.

THIS LACK OF OPENNESS TO GOD'S PRESENCE AND POWER, LOVE AND GRACE, IS DESCRIBED BY JOHN AS DARKNESS.

THE GOOD NEWS IS-THIS DARKNESS IS EASILY OVERCOME BY EVEN THE FAINTEST OF BEAM OF LIGHT.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE OF THIS IN THE AREA OF PHYSICAL LIGHT AND DARKNESS IS FROM MY TIME IN MISSOURI.

ONE NIGHT I WOKE UP TO TOTAL DARKNESS. I COULD NOT EVEN SEE A SHADOW OF MY HAND IN FRONT OF MY FACE.

I REACHED OVER TO TURN ON THE LIGHT-BUT I WAS STILL LEFT IN DARKNESS.

FOR A MOMENT I FEARED I HAD SOMEHOW GONE BLIND, SINCE NOT EVEN THE STREET LIGHT SHONE THROUGH THE CURTAINS.

I FELT MY WAYS TOWARDS THE WINDOW AND PULLED OPEN THE CURTAINS TO STILL SEE NO LIGHT, UNTIL I LOOKED UP AND THROUGH CLOUDS SAW A FAINT BIT OF MOONLIGHT.

I WAS NEVER SO GLAD TO BE IN THE MIDST OF A POWER FAILURE THAN I WAS THAT NIGHT, AFTER I KNEW I HAD NOT GONE BLIND.

LIGHT AND BEGINNINGS, LIGHT AND NEWNESS, LIGHT AND LIFE.

WE SOMETIMES FORGET HOW NECESSARY LIGHT IS TO OUR EXISTENCE, EVEN FOR THOSE WHO ARE BLIND AND CANNOT SEE IT.

PHYSICAL LIGHT WAS THE FIRST THING GOD CREATED, AND ONCE IT EXISTED EVERY THING ELSE COULD COME INTO BEING THAT GOD PLANNED.

AND THIS TIME OF YEAR IS ALL ABOUT LIGHT- DURING THIS SEASON WHEN DARKNESS LASTS LONGER THAN DAYLIGHT.

MANY CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FOCUS ON LIGHT EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO DO NOT CELEBRATE THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF THE DAY.

MANY PLACES AROUND THE WORLD ILLUMINATE THE NIGHT WITH A HUGE VARIETY OF CHRISTMAS LIGHTS.

AND THIS YEAR, IN SOME REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY, PEOPLE ARE ASKED TO KEEP THESE LIGHTS UP UNTIL THE END OF JANUARY TO HONOR FRONT-LINE WORKERS.

EVEN IN THE CHURCH WE HAVE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS JOINING WITH THE USUAL ELECTRIC AND CANDLE LIGHTS.

AND OUR DELIGHT IN SUCH LIGHTS LINGERS INTO THE NEW YEAR.

IN FACT THE YEAR IS OFFICIALLY BROUGHT IN, AT LEAST IN OUR REGION BY THE LIGHTED BALL DROP IN NYC.

BUT THESE MANY COLORED AND SHAPED ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS THAT ARE SO MUCH A PART OF THE SEASON POINT US TO THE GREATER LIGHT, WHO IS JESUS.

IN THE CHURCH THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIGHT CULMINATES ON EPIPHANY WITH OUR REMEMBRANCE OF THE STAR AND THE WISEMEN.

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, HIS WRITING ABOUT LIGHT AND THE BEGINNING PROVIDES US WITH HIS VERSION OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY.

THE EVANGELIST TAKES US BACK TO LOOK AT JESUS BEFORE HIS BIRTH, AND HOW IN HIS INCARNATION HE BROUGHT THE TRUE LIGHT OF GOD INTO THE WORLD.

THE PROPHET ISAIAH FORETOLD OF THIS IN HIS WORDS TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN EXILE.

ALTHOUGH HE WAS ORIGINALLY SPEAKING ABOUT THEIR FUTURE DELIVERANCE, THE HIDDEN MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS IS NOW ABLE TO BE HEARD BY CHRISTIANS.

IN JESUS- OUR LIGHT HAS SHONE IN THE WORLD AND THE GLORY OF GOD IS REVEALED TO US.

AND IN JOHN'S GOSPEL JESUS COMES INTO THE WORLD BEARING US GIFTS BESIDES HIMSELF.

JESUS BRINGS US GRACE AND TRUTH, AND HE ALSO BRINGS TO US THE ABILITY TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD.

BUT UNLIKE THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS, JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD LINGERS ALL THROUGH THE YEAR.

INDEED CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND THE NEW YEARS BALL ARE TEMPORARY. THEY ARE PUT AWAY FOR MOST OF THE YEAR AND BROUGHT OUT FOR US TO SEE FOR A SHORT TIME ONLY.

BUT THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IS NOT ARTIFICIAL. PEOPLE CAN IGNORE IT, AND EVEN DENY IT'S EXISTENCE, BUT THEY CANNOT BOX IT UP AND STORE IT AWAY LIKE ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN GIVES US ONE SIGNIFICANT REASON WHY THIS IS SO.

IT RECORDS THE PRESENCE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST IN A UNIQUE WAY:

“THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD, WHOSE NAME WAS JOHN. HE CAME AS A WITNESS TO TESTIFY TO THE LIGHT.”

ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THIS IS THAT JOHN CAME TO REFLECT THE LIGHT OF CHRIST TO OTHERS.

IN JOHN THE BAPTIST WE SEE A MODEL FOR CHRISTIANS IN ALSO BEING REFLECTORS OF THE LIGHT OF CHRIST-POINTING OTHERS TO HIM.

AN EASTERN ORTHODOX PRIEST EXPLAINS THIS FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCE.

HE WAS A BOY ON THE ISLAND OF CRETE DURING WORLD WAR TWO.

ONE DAY HE CAME UPON THE WRECKAGE OF A GERMAN MOTORCYCLE BY THE ROADSIDE.

HE WAS DRAWN TO BITS OF THE BROKEN MIRROR FROM THE BIKE. HE SAVED THE LARGEST PIECE, WHICH HE WORKED ON WITH A STONE UNTIL THE EDGES WERE SMOOTH.

IT WAS A PLAYTHING FOR HIM AS A BOY. HE POINTED HIS LITTLE MIRROR TOWARDS THE SUNLIGHT WATCHED HOW THE MIRROR REFLECTED THE LIGHT ELSEWHERE.

HE KEPT THAT MIRROR AS HE GREW INTO MANHOOD. AND AS A MAN OF FAITH IN CHRIST, THAT LITTLE MIRROR TOOK ON NEW MEANING.

HE SAW HIMSELF AS A MIRROR THAT REFLECTED THE LIGHT OF CHRIST TO OTHERS.

HE SAID: “...LIKE THE MIRROR I CAN REFLECT LIGHT, TRUTH, AND UNDERSTANDING INTO DARK PLACES WHERE PEOPLE HAVE NO LIGHT.”

HE ADDED THAT AS A PRIEST HE IS ABLE TO HELP SOME PEOPLE COME INTO THE LIGHT OF FAITH AND TO REFLECT THAT LIGHT IN THEIR LIVES.

FOR ALL CHRISTIANS, BEING REFLECTORS OF THE LIGHT OF CHRIST, IS ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT LOVING OTHERS IN CHRIST'S NAME.

WE DO THIS IN SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS- THROUGH PRAYERS, WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, GIVING OF TIME OR MONEY OR THINGS TO OTHERS.

WE CAN ALSO BE LIKE LIVING LIGHTS ILLUMINATING THE WAY FOR OTHERS BY TRYING TO BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE FOR OTHERS.

A GOOD NEW YEARS RESOLUTION FOR US AS INDIVIDUALS AND A CHURCH IS TO LOOK FOR GOD'S BLESSINGS.

FINDING THEM CAN HELP US TO HOLD ONTO A POSITIVE ATTITUDE EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULT TIMES.

YES- EACH OF US SEPARATELY, AND ALL OF US TOGETHER, CAN BECOME LITTLE MIRRORS REFLECTING THE LIGHT-THE LOVE OF JESUS.

HOW CAN WE DO THIS? WE DO IT IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS, OF COURSE.

HERE IS A STORY OF HOW A WOMAN NAMED IDA LEWIS DID THIS. HER WIDOWED FATHER WAS A LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER OFF THE COAST OF RHODE ISLAND IN THE 1850'S.

HE LIVED IN THE LIGHTHOUSE WITH IDA AND HIS OTHER CHILDREN, BUT THEN HE BECAME TOO ILL TO DO THE JOB.

SO AS A TEENAGER, IDA TOOK OVER THE KEEPER'S DUTIES, WHILE ALSO CARING FOR HER FATHER AND SIBLINGS.

DAILY SHE POLISHED THE REFLECTORS, AND MADE SURE THERE WAS OIL IN THE LAMPS, AND REMAINED ALERT FOR DISTRESS SIGNALS.

ONCE SHE WAS AN ADULT, SHE OFFICIALLY TOOK OVER AS THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER.

AND AS SUCH SHE WAS ABLE TO SAVE THE LIVES OF MANY PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS, BY ROWING HER BOAT OUT TO PEOPLE SHE SAW IN DISTRESS.

TWICE, IN FACT, SHE RESCUED SOLDIERS, WHOSE SMALL BOAT OVERTURNED.

THE SECOND TIME SHE DID THIS SHE WAS AWARDED, BY PRESIDENT GRANT THE HIGHEST LIFESAVING AWARD IN THE NATION.

THUS, IT COULD BE SAID THAT IDA REFLECTED CHRIST'S LIGHT IN WAYS THAT LITERALLY SAVED OTHER PEOPLE.

WE MAY NOT HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITY TO SUCH A HIGH DEGREE AS IDA, BUT THERE ARE THINGS WE CAN SAY OR DO, WHICH ENABLE US TO SERVE JESUS BY HELPING OTHERS.

INDEED, WE DO NOT NEED THE POWER OF SPEAKING, OR THE CALLING OF EITHER JOHN THE BAPTIST, OR CHRIST'S FIRST DISCIPLES, TO DO OUR PART IN REFLECTING CHRIST.

WE CAN DO SO THROUGH A KIND WORD SAID TO SOMEONE WE ENCOUNTER DURING OUR DAY, OR BY A SMALL DEED THAT HELPS OR ENCOURAGES SOMEONE.

ONE TYPE OF NEW YEARS PROMISE WE CAN MAKE TO GOD IS TO BE MORE OPEN TO GOD'S BLESSINGS, AND ALSO TO HOW WE MIGHT BE A BLESSING SENT FROM GOD TO OTHERS.

FOR SOME OF US THIS MAY BE VOLUNTEERING IN THE CHURCH OR THE COMMUNITY, WHETHER FOR A SPECIFIC PROJECT, OR IN AN ORGANIZATION.

OTHERS, WHO HAVE THE RESOURCES MAY BE MOVED TO MAKE AN EXTRA DONATION TO MISSION OR OTHER CAUSES. AND SOME OF US CAN HELP BY RECOMMITTING TO PRAY.

FOR EXAMPLE-BY PRAYING WHEN HEARING FIRETRUCKS OR AN AMBULANCE; AND AFTER HEARING OR READING ABOUT SOME TRAGEDY OR TROUBLE, EITHER CLOSE TO HOME OR SOMEWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD.

TRULY, WE SOMETIMES FORGET HOW POWERFUL OUR PRAYERS CAN BE. NOT ONLY MIGHT THEY BE A HELP TO OTHERS, PRAYER CAN STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

AND PRAYER CAN ALSO DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TO NEEDS WE MAY HAVE THE RESOURCES TO HELP WITH IN PHYSICAL WAYS.

IN THESE, AND SO MANY OTHER WAYS THAT COME TO MIND- THE WORDS OF THE VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL SONG:

“THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE, I’M, GONNA LET IT SHINE” - TAKES ON A FRESH MEANING.

THE LITTLE LIGHT IS THE LIGHT OF JESUS, AND WE, LIKE A MIRROR CAN REFLECT IT ELSEWHERE INTO THE WORLD, OR INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

LET US PRAY: HEAVENLY FATHER, AS WE BEGIN THIS NEW YEAR, OPEN OUR EYES AND OUR AWARENESS TO YOUR LIGHT THAT SHINES IN JESUS, AND SHINES WITHIN US THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

WE THANK YOU FOR THIS NEW YEAR, AND FOR ALL THE POTENTIAL IT HOLDS, AS WELL AS FOR CHRIST’S PROMISE TO BE WITH US THROUGH ITS CHALLENGES.

COME, WE PRAY, AND KINDLE WITHIN EACH ONE OF US A MIGHTY FLAME OF YOUR LOVE. GUIDE US SO WE MAY KNOW WHERE AND HOW TO REFLECT THE LIGHT OF CHRIST AND HIS LOVE TO OTHERS.

MAY HIS LIGHT SO REFLECT IN OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS THAT OTHERS WILL SEE CHRIST IN US- AND BE DRAWN CLOSER TO HIM. IN THE NAME OF JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: ISAIAH 60:1-3 & JOHN 1:1-14

LIGHT AND BEGINNINGS, LIGHT AND NEWNESS, LIGHT AND LIFE. WE SOMETIMES FORGET HOW NECESSARY LIGHT IS TO OUR EXISTENCE, EVEN FOR THOSE WHO ARE BLIND AND CANNOT SEE IT.

PHYSICAL LIGHT WAS THE FIRST THING GOD CREATED, AND ONCE IT EXISTED EVERY THING ELSE COULD COME INTO BEING THAT GOD PLANNED. THIS TIME OF YEAR IS ALL ABOUT LIGHT- DURING THIS SEASON WHEN DARKNESS LASTS LONGER THAN DAYLIGHT.

MANY CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FOCUS ON LIGHT EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO DO NOT CELEBRATE THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF THE DAY. AND OUR DELIGHT IN SUCH LIGHTS LINGERS INTO THE NEW YEAR.

IN THE CHURCH THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIGHT CULMINATES ON EPIPHANY WITH OUR REMEMBRANCE OF THE STAR AND THE WISEMEN.

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, HIS WRITING ABOUT LIGHT AND THE BEGINNING PROVIDES US WITH HIS VERSION OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY.

IN JESUS- OUR LIGHT HAS SHONE IN THE WORLD AND THE GLORY OF GOD IS REVEALED TO US. BUT UNLIKE THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS, JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD LINGERS ALL THROUGH THE YEAR.

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IS NOT ARTIFICIAL. PEOPLE CAN IGNORE IT, AND EVEN DENY IT'S EXISTENCE, BUT THEY CANNOT BOX IT UP AND STORE IT AWAY LIKE ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN GIVES US ONE SIGNIFICANT REASON WHY THIS IS SO. IT RECORDS THE PRESENCE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST IN A UNIQUE WAY: "THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD, WHOSE NAME WAS JOHN. HE CAME AS A WITNESS TO TESTIFY TO THE LIGHT." ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THIS IS THAT JOHN CAME TO REFLECT THE LIGHT OF CHRIST TO OTHERS.

AN EASTERN ORTHODOX PRIEST EXPLAINS THIS FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCE. HE FOUND A BROKEN MIRROR AND SMOOTHED OUT IT EDGES. IT WAS A PLAYTHING FOR HIM AS A BOY. HE POINTED HIS LITTLE MIRROR TOWARDS THE SUNLIGHT WATCHED HOW THE MIRROR REFLECTED THE LIGHT ELSEWHERE.

AND AS A MAN OF FAITH IN CHRIST, THAT LITTLE MIRROR TOOK ON NEW MEANING. HE SAW HIMSELF AS A MIRROR THAT REFLECTED THE LIGHT OF CHRIST TO OTHERS. HE SAID: "...LIKE THE MIRROR I CAN REFLECT LIGHT, TRUTH, AND UNDERSTANDING INTO DARK PLACES WHERE PEOPLE HAVE NO LIGHT."

FOR ALL CHRISTIANS, BEING REFLECTORS OF THE LIGHT OF CHRIST, IS ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT LOVING OTHERS IN CHRIST'S NAME. WE DO THIS IN SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS- THROUGH PRAYERS, WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, GIVING OF TIME OR MONEY OR THINGS TO OTHERS.

WE CAN ALSO BE LIKE LIVING LIGHTS ILLUMINATING THE WAY FOR OTHERS BY TRYING TO BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE FOR OTHERS. EACH OF US SEPARATELY, AND ALL OF US TOGETHER, CAN BECOME LITTLE MIRRORS REFLECTING THE LIGHT-THE LOVE OF JESUS.

FOR SOME OF US THIS MAY BE VOLUNTEERING IN THE CHURCH OR THE COMMUNITY, WHETHER FOR A SPECIFIC PROJECT, OR IN AN ORGANIZATION. OTHERS, WHO HAVE THE RESOURCES MAY BE MOVED TO MAKE AN EXTRA DONATION TO MISSION OR OTHER CAUSES.

AND SOME OF US CAN HELP BY RECOMMITTING TO PRAY. TRULY, WE SOMETIMES FORGET HOW POWERFUL OUR PRAYERS CAN BE. NOT ONLY MIGHT THEY BE A HELP TO OTHERS, PRAYER CAN STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

IN THESE, AND SO MANY OTHER WAYS THAT COME TO MIND- THE WORDS OF THE VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL SONG: "THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE, I'M, GONNA LET IT SHINE" -TAKES ON A FRESH MEANING. THE LITTLE LIGHT IS THE LIGHT OF JESUS, AND WE, LIKE A MIRROR CAN REFLECT IT ELSEWHERE INTO THE WORLD, OR INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS. AME