

Are there mornings when you wake up and the sunlight is pouring through your windows; you are looking forward to the day and can't wait to get started? Everything seems perfect, nothing can go wrong; you want to praise God just for being alive! God has brought you to the beginning of another day...and another opportunity to almost luxuriate in this world that God has created!

That was what I felt I first reviewed the readings for today! Joyfulness, and as a result of the Incarnation of Jesus, an opportunity to both relive the celebration of that birth in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, as well to celebrate God and this very special gift for the world in my daily work and example.

As I was doing my background reading and preparation for today, I reviewed commentaries from many sources, and found that lessons assigned for the Sunday after Christmas in the Revised Common Lectionary, were not the three we read this morning here at St. Benedict's, or for that matter, throughout the Episcopal Church.

Those readings were from Isaiah, Hebrews and Matthew's Gospel. These are all important parts of Scripture, and we will read them over the 3-year Cycle of the Lectionary, but somehow the Episcopal Church Lectionary team felt we needed something else.

I asked myself, what makes these readings important for us today? Could the message we were to come away with today be at the very beginning of the service: The Collect? Remember what Rev. Linzi shared in her sermon about the Collect – how it “collects” us together into one spiritual whole.

So, let's read today's Collect again together: “Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen”

Read it again. [Silence] What word or phrase jumps out to you? How does your body feel? How does your spirit feel? What emotion or emotions do these few phrases spark in you?

Is it Hope? Is it Love? Is it Happiness? Is it Light? Do they stir your Spirit to share the “Good News” that God loves you and gave himself to the world, in the form of his Son, Jesus?

That is exactly the way I felt when I first read these lessons. Happiness, Hope, Peace, a Lightness came through all of the readings for me. Let's review some of the words and phrases:

From Isaiah: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God”
“[Zion's] vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch”

From Galatians: “God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts” “you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God”

And, finally, from John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and Word was God.” “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...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth”

We opened today with Light in the Collect...we continued with light and rejoicing through Isaiah and the Psalm, we’ve been adopted by God as heirs in Galatians, and we grow into the light, grace and truth through Jesus Christ in John! What a journey!

John has connected the story of Jesus – the Word- with the story of creation in Genesis. The Word existed before time began, not only *with* God in the beginning, but the Word *was* God. And then God gave the greatest gift of all...the Incarnation of Christ...the Word became human and lived among us. It is only through Jesus that we glimpse God’s glory and gracious nature; for in the birth of the Son of God and through faith we also became children of God. What an inheritance for us to share with the rest of the world.

This time of year is a metaphor for the light that appeared in the world with the birth of Jesus. The morning is still dark when we wake up (for me this is between 4 and 5). It’s dark, no light, the moon is gone, the stars and planets are dimming, and it can feel very lonely and scary. But slowly, the sun rises, the light returns and a new day begins. And we are given yet another opportunity for this new light to shine forth in our lives and through our lives, as we pray in the Collect.

The creators of the Lectionary somehow, in their wisdom, selected the perfect readings for this Sunday after Christmas when we would be waking up in the dark, and needing a reminder of the light that Jesus birth brought to the world.

I urge you take this time in the morning, before you stir from bed, before you join the hubbub of the day, to take time to pray today’s collect, to acknowledge the great gift of the Light – the Word - that God gave us. Ask yourself, how might you reflect this light into the world through your words and actions? How might you glorify God and rejoice in the gift of his Son? How might you be the only Gospel your neighbor sees today?

Amen.