

25 December 2011: Christmas Day III
Shepherd-by-the-Sea, Gualala
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[Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14]

Here we are. In the light. You are in the light. You are in the light. We are disarmed in the light. What is this light?

This light is the Word, this light is life, this light is God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 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.”

Word, God, life, light.

The grace of this feast of Christmas is to stand disarmed before the light, before the life, the Word, before God. The grace of Christmas is to know with assurance that the light is gracious, is miraculous, is love, to know that we exist in the light, to see others—friends, strangers, enemies—in the light. The grace of Christmas is to discover that we are not afraid of the light.

It is also to realize that—whatever we tell ourselves, whatever we may think—there is actually no hiding from this light.

“In the beginning was the Word.” From before the beginning, within God, is communication, disclosure, light... love.

God created this universe, created it in love, out of love, for love. God created—through this “Word” that is light and life and love, and that is Godself—God created every creature that is, in love, out of love, for love.... for relationship, for communion, for disclosure, for intimacy, like the intimacy between God and the Word, indwelling, full of grace and truth.

We are—the world *is* and we *are*, each of us—an expression, an inflection, a distinct variation, of this ecstatic outpouring of love, of light, of life, of delight, of the Word coming forth from God and returning to God. You are a word spoken by the Word. God is relationship, love, delight, and we are *gifts* from God to God. We are words spoken by the Word, spoken by God to God, coming from God and returning to God, and we are given our own being, our own freedom, our own inner depths within the radiance of God’s creative and articulate delight. You are a word from God to God.

You don’t need me to tell you that it all has somehow become more complicated than that, or at least so it seems to us—very convincingly!—most of the time. But the grace of this feast, I believe, is to find ourselves caught up in that circle of radiant delight, to find ourselves soaked in the light and to know that the light is good, to know that we are made for it, made for the light,

made for life, because we are made for God by the Word who is light and love and is God, and who became one of us that the light might indeed shine in us and through us. The light is in you. The grace of this feast is to find the word that is you, the word that is me, resonating exquisitely with the Word that is God, that our lives and our words might also give light and life. What do you notice today in the light?

We have always existed in this light and always will. We do not have power over this light. We *cannot* make this light to stop shining on us and around us. This is unconditional love, the only really unconditional love, because only God's love is actually, really unconditional because only God is unconditional. We cannot control, diminish, deflect or manipulate the light that shines through the universe. There's nothing to be done. We're stuck with being loved because God is God and we aren't. Can you relax into the light?

Somehow, we get diverted from the delight of standing in openness to that light. Somehow, we flinch, somehow we forget.

In damage done to us by others, so much of it unintended, in the damage we do to others and to ourselves, a certain darkness does enter our minds, an illusion, really, that we are not really completely in the light, that we are somehow hidden and separate and unloved, and then the illusion that if the darkness in us came to light it would be to our diminishment and condemnation, that it would cancel what light and love we do still enjoy.

And in this fear of diminishment we lash out, or lash in, we do whatever we do, seeking to fill our emptiness, our neediness, to protect our weakness. Convinced of hidden and unknown darkness within us, we shrink from the light. How all this comes to happen is a baffling mystery, and at the same time the most obvious and everyday stuff of "the world" as we know it in our fear and illusion.

But all the while, each of us, everyone, the whole universe, is suspended, sustained, surrounded in the light. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." There is no darkness, really. "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." There is only our fear, and the illusions and damage that ensues, layer upon layer upon layer.

All this is to say something rather obvious... We don't always want to step into the light.

And so the light has come to us. "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." Today we stand in the light. Jesus is that light. The grace of Christmas is to find ourselves in the light, to know that nothing in us is hidden from him, and the love keeps coming. Christ's perception of us is absolutely accurate and true because it is infinite and unconditional love. Only love knows the truth.

We exist in the light. It falls to us simply to step more consciously into the light, to open ourselves willingly and consciously to the light, to see what the light reveals and to allow that to be transformed in love. This is a process, a process called "salvation." Salvation is an utterly free gift, and it's also the learning to receive the gift.

“To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” Salvation is utterly free gift. And it’s the learning to receive.

Here we are, in the light, in “the true light, which enlightens everyone.” This light is for everyone. Everyone already exists in this light. Today, we know the light is nothing to fear. What do you notice, today, in the light? What do you notice within yourself? What do you notice?

Today, may God give us grace to say yes, yes, yes, to the light, to learn to receive the gift, to open ourselves more and more consciously and deeply, willingly, freely, joyfully, to the light, and to see one another, everyone, friend, stranger, enemy, in the light.

“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.”

Offertory Sentence:

Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

Christmas Blessing:

May Almighty God, who sent his Son to take our nature upon him, bless you in this holy season, scatter the darkness of sin, and brighten your heart with the light of his holiness. Amen.

May God, who sent his angels to proclaim the glad news of the Savior's birth, fill you with joy, and make you heralds of the Gospel. Amen.

May God, who in the Word made flesh joined heaven to earth and earth to heaven, give you his peace and favor. Amen.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you for ever.
Amen.