

“Light and Life to All He Brings”
John 1:1-14

Several years ago, Erin Dunigan, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, spent two weeks in Israel to learn about the crisis between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

During the fortnight she and her delegation spent in Israel,
they visited with people, listened to their stories, and heard about the escalating tensions that continue to fester over the separation wall –

the wall which encircles the town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of the One whom most Christians acknowledge as the Prince of peace.

One day they ventured about 90 miles north to Nazareth to visit with other Christians living in Israel, and as they enjoyed a meal with them,

one woman mentioned that many people who live outside Bethlehem and the walled area are reluctant to support their Palestinian sisters and brothers.

Erin Dunigan was shocked.

They were so close . . .

they were in the same vicinity . . .

and yet they were denying that there was an issue.

“How can they fail to acknowledge what is happening?” she asked.

“It’s easy,” the woman responded.

“You see, if they believe it, then they have to act.

It’s easier not to believe.”¹

It’s easier not to believe.

Of course, it is.

That is why our culture barricades itself with the walls of commercialism and consumption,
with yuletide parties and year-end profits,

with Christmas rushing and wrapping . . .

because if we come to believe the *true* message of Christmas,

then we would have to act – differently.

And because we would have to act – differently –

we often ignore the essence of Christmas

and instead inundate ourselves with the trivial trappings of anxiety-producing events.

And yet, Christians have wrestled with this issue throughout the ages.

I mean, simply consider how gloriously John’s gospel highlights the wonder of the incarnation,

¹ Erin Dunigan, “A Conversion Story,” *inSpire* (Volume 10, Number 2), Winter/Spring 2006: page 49.

of God becoming human to live in the world . . .

for what has come into being through the Word that became flesh is life,
and the life was the light of all people.

In one poetic verse, John intertwines life and light and humanity,
and all have come into being through the Word.

But amazingly this life-giving light that not only shines in the darkness but also enlightens every human being

apparently went unrecognized and unnoticed by the world.

This light was even shining among His own people,
and yet His own people did not accept Him.

Even for Jesus' own people, it was easier not to believe . . .

because, if they believed, they would have to act – differently.

However, when we actually dare to believe that Christ's Light will shine in our darkness,
then at Christmas God is inspiring us to venture toward new and perhaps unknown realities,
believing that the One who illumines our path will also lead us to life.

To embrace the Word that became flesh is

to participate in shining the light of life for all humanity,

for God has entered the darkness to walk with us and to show us the way.

God refuses to be indifferent, insulated, or isolated from humanity in the heavens above,
safely detached from any involvement with creation

while the drama of human life unfolds upon the earthly stage

Instead, God climbs right into the darkest places to be with us . . .

and through God's holy and luminous light, we are pointed in a new direction that
leads us to life.

Of course, it is easier not to believe . . .

but when we do believe the true message of Christmas,

we recognize that "light and life to all He brings,"

and we too are called to live,

not according to the ways of the world, but according to the wisdom of the One who
is the Wonderful Counselor,

not by appropriating policies based on power, production, or paranoia, but by
finding our strength in the Mighty God and by experiencing the love of the
Everlasting Father,

not through decrees of dominance and desperation, but by following the
Prince of peace who provides us with a peace that the world cannot give.

It is easier not to believe . . .

it is easier to wade through the superficial sentimentality of the season . . .

because when we realize that the true message of Christmas reveals the light and life that the Christ Child brings to all humanity,

those of us who *do* believe are summoned to act – differently –

and to live out our faith by shining God’s light on anything and everything that perpetuates the darkness of poverty, greed, rejection, and exploitation.

It is easier not to believe . . .

but when we do believe, what a difference God’s people can make . . .

because, when we believe the message of Christmas,

we are willing to listen, not to the propaganda of popular personalities,

but to the Word, to the Word that became flesh and lived among us.

With yesterday’s launch of NASA’s James Webb telescope to explore more deeply into the mysteries of the universe,

I thought of the well-known scientist, Carl Sagan who, late in his life, became interested in the “search for extraterrestrial intelligence.”

He was intrigued with the search for other beings out there in the universe who might be communicating with us.

So radio telescopes were set up, and they listened to radio waves throughout the universe to see if someone was trying to communicate with Earth.

After some time with no results, someone eventually said to Carl Sagan, “What if we never get any messages?”

“It’s a possibility,” he said,

“but it’s a depressing thought to me that there might be no one in the universe trying to call us.”

Maybe so . . . but those of us in the Christian faith know that there *is* some Being in the universe calling us,

that God does not stand aloof from us

and is not indifferent to us

but communicates with us,²

and summons us with a word, with *the* Word,

with the Word that became flesh and lived among us to show us how to live – differently.

² This illustration was adapted from Tom Long’s sermon, entitled “Where You Never Expected to Be,” at http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/long_5004.htm

Yes, my friends, sometimes, it is easier not to believe . . .

it is easier to follow another way, to embrace another truth, to pursue another life . . .

but the Child of Bethlehem, the Word of God Incarnate, the One who became flesh and lived among us,

leads us to pursue a new reality, a new humanity,

for He is the Way, the Truth, the Life.

And because the Christmas message He reveals is presented to do us good,

and because the Christmas message He shares inspires us to live differently,

let us experience the presence of Christ who is doing a new thing among us . . .

let us bask in the light of Christ so that we may shine God's light in the world . . .

and let us together . . . together . . . for the common good . . . share God's love with all humanity . . .

for, as we do, "*light and life* to all will He bring" . . .

and, at Christmas, those are gifts that God always gives to all of us.

This sermon delivered by Tom Ulrich
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