

# THE LIGHT | JOHN 1:1-14

## | 11/29 & 12/2 2018

The Light comes revealing the inexhaustible world of God's gifts and promises. The Light brings us sight, knowledge and understanding of Creator and creation. The Lights' character is truth and grace; undimmed by the darkness. This Light is the Word that was with God and was God—personal and self-giving. This Light became flesh and lived amongst us and we beheld His radiance. This is John's take on the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke write like kayakers on a swiftly flowing river with occasional patches of white water. There's never any doubt that they're going where the course of the river takes them. But John is more like a canoe on a quiet lake, drifting unhurriedly, paddling leisurely to take the sights along the shoreline, noticing rock formation, observing a Blue Herron fishing in the rushes, pausing and drifting to sketch cloud patterns reflected n the glassy water. So as we get ready to travel the smoothly flowing rhythms of John's prose, prepare yourselves for some breathtaking scenery. Eugene Peterson, *The Message Devotional Bible*, (Nav Press, 2018), page 1216.

One of the most important elements of Christianity rings prominent in the four Gospels as it relates to this Light who is the Revealer – our God and the Word who becomes flesh, Emmanuel, God with us – is personal in Being and action. Note the interpersonal activity surrounding the first Advent in Mary's first prayer (Luke 1:46-55).

Before Mary prays a half-dozen words, we realize that this girl knew her family story—the Holy Scriptures—which tells the ways that God has been speaking and working among his people for two thousand years. We recognize that the words in the prayer were taken and then recast from the prayer of Hannah, her ancestor from a thousand years earlies, who became miraculously pregnant with Samuel [1 Samuel 2:1-10] the heart of Mary's prayer, like Hannah's, involves three great reversals in the way we experience the world when God conceives new life in us: (1) God establishes his strength and disestablishes the proud (Luke 1:51), (2) God pulls down the people at the top and lifts up the people at the bottom (verse 52), and (3) God fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty (verse 53).

Mary's prayer [as Advent itself] takes us into an expansive world of God's promises that are in the process of being fulfilled. Prayer enlarges our imagination and makes us grateful, joyful participants in what has been the what is yet to come.

Prayer is our way of being attentively present to God, who is present to us in the Holy Spirit. So it's not surprising to find that Luke, whose task was to maintain and develop the organic continuities between Jesus and his company of followers, frequently brings us to prayer.

Prayer begins when God addresses us. First God speaks, our response, our answer, is our prayer. On the basis of this prayer, the first prayer in the gospel story, many understand Mary as the archetypal Christian, the person who hears and receives, believes and submits to the Word that conceives Christ in us. Peterson, *the Message*, page 1169.

Another dominant aspect found in the gospels regarding the Advent of the Christ is its universal reach. Luke sounds a clear note in proclaiming “I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people” (Lk 2:10). In our text this week John uses a very wide-angle lens in his prologue “In him (the Word) was life, and the life was the light of men... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” John 1:4, 9.

I want to explore how this *Light* (Greek **phos**, meaning brightness, light itself, or that which radiates light) *enlightens* (**photizo**, meaning to illumine, to bring to light, to make known) every person in every age. This is a startling pronouncement. In my reading I ran across a an alarming interpretation of our modern time as it relates to Emmanuel, God with us. The author, David Kettle, draws on various authors in stating that modern Western culture, as it relates to Christianity can now be called “In the Middle of Winter.” Kettle continues:

Recalling Karl Rahner’s observation that in Western society today it is “the Season of Winter in Christianity” the light of faith is dim; the voice of God is faint; spiritual life is at a low ebb... There is wisdom here to check two perverse tendencies. The first is refusal to face how bleak is the landscape for Christian faith today and try to carry on inherited patterns of church life and ministry as if nothing had changed; to bury our heads in face of the statistics of decline and the huge ignorance and apathy regarding Christianity. The second is a premature, rash announcement of God’s “springtime.” Both are acts of denial, and a hindrance to responsible faithfulness.

We might recall here another Winter—the perpetual Winter of the land of Narnia in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, an effect of Narnia’s domination by the White Witch. Are we not bound to ask: what principalities and power, what great configurations of human sin, cast a spell on human life today making us blind to the light of Christ, asleep to participation in the infinite life of God?

Faithfulness in the Western Winter of Christianity requires more than waiting quietly for God’s voice to be heard afresh. Rather it required that with renewed vigor we immerse ourselves in the reality of what God has done in Christ, while bringing with us all that modern life has revealed to us, and seeking to discover afresh from God bearings from which to understand our situation and our responsibilities before God. This may bring new insights. I want to suggest some key “moments of illumination” that arise in close Christian encounter with Western culture. It also requires us to grasp with renewed vitality what God has already entrusted to us, to recapitulate afresh our Christian cultural heritage, and to become more intentional, imaginative stewards of this. David J. Kettle, *Western Culture In Gospel Context*, (Cascade Books, 2011) pages 23-25.

