

“A STAR IN HIS WINDOW”  
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Elkton United Methodist Church  
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Christmas Eve

John 1:1-14

Luke 2:1-20

One year, at Christmastime, a man and his small son were walking slowly down the streets of a large American city. It was wartime, and back then, some of you will recall that when a family had a member serving in the armed forces, they displayed a star in the window of their home. Well, this little boy was delighted to spot many service stars hanging in the windows of homes on the roads they were walking. His father told him how proud each family was to have their son (as it mostly was back then) serving their country, and tried, as much as he could, to help him understand what a sacrifice that was.

So, knowing that, the little boy was on the hunt for those stars, and when he saw one, he would clap, and he would really clap if he saw a home that had more than one star in their window. Then, there came a point in their walk where there was a gap between houses and it was pretty dark out.

That little boy looked up into that dark sky and there he saw the North Star shining brightly, and he clapped his hands and looked up at his dad with a big smile on his face and said, “Oh look, Daddy! God must have given his Son too, for he has a star in his window!”

Oh friends, out of the mouths of babes! Tonight, on this holy night, we come together to remember that indeed God did give his son – to love, and serve and sacrifice – and so we join that little boy with smiles on our faces and joy in our hearts and we give thanks to God for his great gift to us all.

Tonight we remember that God sent his Son because the world had become lost. It was, much like that world in that little boy’s time, a world at war – but the one they were fighting was God himself. At every opportunity, humanity turned away. Over and over again, God poured love down, and over and over again, humanity sinned and turned away from him. He gave them chance after chance, to no avail.

And so it was, instead of turning away from us, as God most assuredly had every right to do, instead he gave himself even more fully – he sent his Son into the world – not as a King sitting on a throne, or a warrior riding in on a steed, but as a

baby born just as each of us, put into his mother's arms, who wrapped him up and laid him down to sleep.

God sent his Son in such a way as to say, "I know you. I know everything about you. I will walk this earth like you, as one of you. I will know your joys, I will feel your sorrows. I will smile, and I will experience pain. And I will show you what love looks like." And so he did.

You know, whenever I think about Jesus as a baby lying in a manger, I always remember a story I once read about how, every year, there's a rash of thefts of baby Jesuses from mangers all over the world. The writer who told this story commented that she had been on a walk in the city of Chicago and came upon the huge manger scene on a city square, and noticed that the baby Jesus had actually been chained to the manger so no one could steal him!

Then she went on to tell some tales about stolen baby Jesuses, and the one that sticks in my mind was one that was stolen, and then about eight months later, suddenly reappeared on its owner's front porch, along with a set of pictures, showing all the places this baby Jesus had been in that time. One picture showed him on a bicycle seat, another on a beach chair beside the ocean, still another in an airplane seat, and so on and so on.

And while that is amusing, the one who told that story said this: "You and I who hear the Christmas gospel know that the real Jesus can't be kept in the manger by means of chains." Because we see Jesus everywhere.

We see this star in God's window, His only begotten Son, in every act of kindness and generosity, in every act of sacrifice offered for another.

I saw God's star shining brightly not long ago, in a sub shop in Newark. I went in there one Friday night to pick up a couple of subs for Mom and me, and, as you can imagine, on Friday night when a lot of people are tired and order out, there was a wait. So I stood there with the others near the counter, and a man walked in, greeted the woman behind the counter, and then said hello to another woman who was standing near me waiting for her subs too. Apparently he knew her, and the woman at the counter said, "Oh, you know each other?" "Yes," the man said, "she's a church lady."

Well, the eyes of the woman at the counter perked up, and she began to share how she'd moved to Delaware about nine months ago and hadn't been able to find a church, and she really wanted to, and with a smile on her face, and warmth in her heart and words, this other woman standing by me began to tell her all about her church, and invited her to join them, and even told her she would wait for her at the door so they could sit together.

Bear in mind, this wasn't that long ago, and I'll bet that woman new to Delaware was sad about being away from her family in a new place at Christmas, and then, just like that, that "star in God's window" his Son led that woman to reach out to a stranger and welcome her in.

You see what I mean? You can't keep Jesus in a manger.

He's everywhere. He's in a friend who picks up another friend and takes her home from the hospital and gets her settled in. He's in the smiles and outreach of people from our church who this week lifted the spirits of tired teachers in three elementary schools with a surprise meal. He is in the voices of our choir who last week moved us to tears with their wonderful cantata – reminding us again that the One we're waiting for loves us more than we know.

He's there when a child who is sad because their mother or father is incarcerated still knows joy because they have Christmas presents to open because of Angel Tree friends. He's there when caregivers – in whatever uniform they wear (nurses, doctors, EMTs, police officers, military personnel) – sacrifice of their time with family and friends to help others.

He's there in the voices of those who stand up and speak out – for creation, for those who are suffering, for those who are oppressed.

Friends, Jesus, "the star in God's window," is everywhere! You can't keep Jesus in a manger, for he came to care and forgive and show us what love looks like! When God could have done anything he wanted to a sinful and selfish people, instead he took that "star in his window" his only begotten Son and sent him to love us and all of creation.

But let me say this as well – though Jesus is everywhere, he is right here too, right here with you. He came, yes, for the world, but please never, ever forget that he came for you. It's so easy for us to look at the big picture tonight, how God's love in Christ encompasses the world, but please remember the smaller picture too – he loves you. He came for you.

I know some of you really need to hear that right now. For some of you are hurting – because of illness or struggles or pain or loneliness. Some of you feel unloved because the world has made you feel that way. Please hear again the words of the angels, "For you is born this day in the City of David a Savior . . ." for you. For you. It's personal. He came for you. He loves you. He walks with you, and sometimes he carries you when you can't carry yourself. Never forget that "the star in God's window, Jesus, his beloved Son," came for you. Let that knowledge wrap around you like a warm blanket of love, and carry you through every day of your life.

In a few moments, we'll be passing the light of Christ through this room as we light candles. It is a beautiful thing to watch the dark room fill up with flickers of candlelight and we see its reflection on the faces of all who are here and especially up on the beautiful ceiling above us. But it's more than just a beautiful thing to watch – it is a true expression of what God has done in sending Jesus to be among us. He has sent light into our dark world and slowly but surely it moves out and makes a difference – it lights up the darkness with love.

So I want to end by reading something a man named Peter Loughman wrote about Christmas Eve candle lighting. It goes like this:

“Every time on Christmas Eve that I light my candle, I catch myself staring into the flame – I can't seem to help it. There, I hold one small ordinary candle with a small flickering light. In and of itself, my little flame doesn't cast much light, but I don't know, somehow I find that flame comforting. The flame, small as it is, casts aside the darkness – with my flame I know that I am no longer alone – I know this flame is not just a flame, it represents the light of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has come to me and given me hope.”

“I know that in a few short minutes I will have to return to the difficulties of my life, health issues, financial worries, problems I know deep down will not go away on their own. But right now, I, as I stare into the flame I realize again that I do not have to bear it all on my own. I, as I stare into the flame, I know that Jesus Christ has the ability to see me through. I just need to call on him.”

“Then I look up and I see a whole congregation full of light. It is not that each of us are a light, rather, each of us can hold the light of Jesus in our hearts. There is a flame among us, the flame that moves silently among us until there is not a person unaffected by the light. It is then that I finally understand the words of the Apostle John – ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with 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.’”

Dear friends, on this night of nights, my prayer is, that as you hold that flickering candle in your hand, and stare into the flame, you will remember that Jesus came for you and for all humankind, he came to show us what love looks like, and he invites us to share his love with all the world. May the warmth of his light fill you this night and all the days to come.

Amen

