

You will notice in today's collect, that the theme of light is emphasized. It reads,

ALMIGHTY God, who hast poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word;
Grant that the same light enkindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives; through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In this prayer, Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the light that is poured upon us, that illuminates us and reveals the world to us. But it does not stop there. We ask God that this light, causing new life in us through the Spirit of God, would then radiate from us into the world. The movement is from Christ to us to the world. The implication is that as the light of Christ has given us new life, so too would His light shining forth from us engender new life in others and bring healing to the created order.

Wherefore is the need for new life and healing? Well, we know that sin entered into the world through the one man, Adam, so now the cure for sin, that heals the world enters in through the God-man, Christ. Christ's healing must spread throughout the world, reclaiming what was previously lost in mankind's disobedience.

Of course, evil is always at war with God. Satan, through Herod, sought to snuff out the light of Christ when He was first born, but Joseph, with Mary and the young Jesus, fled into exile. God's good is never overcome, but must sometimes persevere in patience until the time is right to return from exile.

Even in Nazareth, the boy Jesus didn't immediately make everything perfect. The world wasn't immediately healed. Jesus waited for decades before His public ministry commenced, but after His baptism, Christ begins to heal the sick, to bind up the broken hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives. He not only shows Himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, but He explicitly claims this for Himself in Luke 4:21. There Jesus, after reading

the Isaiah passage that we read for our epistle this morning, proclaims, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

But in this passage, what are we to make of that phrase, “the acceptable year of the Lord”? Christ here is talking about the year of Jubilee. Every 50th year in Israel, all debts were forgiven, indentured servants were freed, lands were returned to their ancestral Hebrew tribes. In a sense, the world was reset. All of the disorder that had occurred over the previous 49 years was re-ordered back to how it was intended to be.

Why was this every 50th year? Well, seven is the number of completion. This most clearly experienced by us in a week of seven days – a complete week. Seven years is in a sense then, a week of years, a complete period of years. What about a week of weeks? Seven, sevens, or 49 years? This is a number that shows a multiplicity of completion, complete completion, as it were. It is a number that shows the end of an era or age and the ushering in of a renewed, refreshed age.

As Christians, we call ourselves an 8th day people. Christ rose on the 8th day, the first day of a new week, and we contrast this with the Jews, whose sabbath is the end of the week. From the earliest times, the Church has gathered to worship on the first day of the week for Christ rose from the grave on the first day. We also see in John 20, that Jesus meets with the Apostles on the 1st day of the week and then again 8 days later, also on the 1st day of the week. (Remember that Jews recon intervals including the first and last so their 8 days to us would be a week later.) Jesus is teaching the Apostles here how to do Church, and the pattern He set has persisted throughout the history of the Church.

We are an 8th day people. We are a people of the Jubilee. We are about beginnings, characterized by the continually renewed life we have in Christ. The year of Jubilee was a prophetic picture for the Jews of the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom. Christ is the

fulfillment of the Jubilee, and the Holy Spirit which came on Pentecost – 50 days after Easter, another indication of Jubilee – is the seal of the Messianic Kingdom.

Of course, we know that Satan was not happy about the Incarnation. He tried to kill Christ through Herod, but failed to do so. Herod persecuted Christ, but God ended Herod when the time was fulfilled that the boy Jesus should return into Israel. Satan's first attempt failed, but through the religious leaders of Israel, he did eventually kill Christ on Good Friday. Of course we know that Satan did not take the life of Jesus, but that rather Jesus laid down His life for the whole world. He is the propitiation of our sins. And, as Jesus had the power to lay down His life, so too did He have the power to take it up again, restoring humanity to the glory for which it was originally created.

The Incarnation of Christ was the first element of the restoration of all things in God. It was the symbol of Jubilee. It was the beginnings of the turning back of the curse of Adam. God has become man, and now everything is changed. Though Christ is no longer bodily present on earth, the presence of Christ continues with us. Emmanuel, God is still with us for, as baptized members of the Church, the Spirit of Christ resides in us, always remaking us, always renewing us from sin, always giving us new life, and renewal each and every day. In the words of the collect, always pouring the light of Christ into us so that Christ would shine forth through us into the world.

In other words, the gospel should make a difference, not only in ourselves, but also in the broader world. Our lives should make a difference, should make things better. The Church should be the solution, not the problem. This is how the Old Testament lesson from the Prophet Micah puts it:

2 Many nations shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of

Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.”

For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

3 He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off;

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.

4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make *them* afraid; For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

5 For all people walk each in the name of his god,

But we will walk in the name of the LORD our God Forever and ever.

The Church, meaning you and I, is the mountain of the Lord that draws all men unto it.

Today’s Psalm similarly points this out:

9 O Lord God of hosts, who is like unto thee? * thy truth, most mighty Lord, is on every side.

10 Thou rulest the raging of the sea; * thou stillest the waves thereof when they arise.

11 Thou hast subdued Egypt, and destroyed it; * thou hast scattered thine enemies abroad with thy mighty arm.

12 The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine; * thou hast laid the foundation of the round world, and all that therein is.

13 Thou hast made the north and the south; * Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy Name.

14 Thou hast a mighty arm; * strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand.

15 Righteousness and equity are the habitation of thy seat; * mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

16 Blessed is the people, O Lord, that can rejoice in thee; * they shall walk in the light of thy countenance.

17 Their delight shall be daily in thy Name; * and in thy righteousness shall they make their boast.

18 For thou art the glory of their strength, * and in thy loving-kindness thou shalt lift up our horns.

19 For the Lord is our defence; * the Holy One of Israel is our King.

In these verses, we see the Truth of God, the Might of God, the Justice and Righteousness of God going out from Him. We see the people of God, blessed in the light of His countenance. And we recall how we are to be the light of Christ to the world. This is how we are supposed to be.

And yet, it seems that we are in the darkest part of the year. We are in the wettest part of the year. We are still in the Christmas season; we are still feasting, and we have the feast of the Epiphany coming up this week. And yet ...

The reality is that this is a hard time of year. We know of many who are fighting cancer and other diseases – both old and young. There has been deaths of people that are close to us or to our parish community. I know of marriages that are under stress and are failing. Our society has lost its sense of reality; our children are struggling. And the everyday grind can be tiring, especially when it seems not to really accomplish anything. And not seeing the sun due to the shorter days doesn't help either. If you are struggling with life right now, be assured that you are not alone.

Faith is easy when things are going our way and the sun is shining, but that isn't the time that faith is needed. Faith is needed in the darkness. Of course you all already understand that the life and the light of Christ poured into us doesn't make everything automatically perfect. Rather it perfects us when we persist in faith through the difficulties. The light of Christ isn't needed when it is already bright in our lives. It is needed in the darkness, to push back the darkness. This is why the Church calendar, in God's providence, celebrates the Nativity of Christ, The Incarnation, in the darkest part of the year, for this is when we need the light most of all. This is when we need to be reminded that the light of Christ will never be snuffed out by His enemies.

Where do we find the light? Well in Christ of course, but what does this really mean? Jesus isn't in some vial that we just pull out whenever we need it like in the Lord of the Rings. No, the light is in us. Jesus shines through us. This doesn't mean that we are irrationally happy

or constantly laughing and happy. It means that we must constantly remind ourselves of the Truth of God in Christ. It means that based upon His Truth, we continue to wake up each day, doing the things we need to do. In the words of the prayer book, “to do all such good works as Thou hast prepared for us to walk in.” Being the light of Christ to the world doesn’t mean that we never feel low. It means that we, with explicit intention, decide to press on in life, doing the best we can despite all of the challenges that we face.

Yes, we know the end of the story. Jesus has already won, and His victory will be universally acknowledged in the day of judgment. That is the day when all of our sorrows and struggles will fade away. But that day often seems very, very, far away when the darkness is pressing in upon us today.

So how are we to carry on? There is a place for just putting one’s nose the grindstone – courageously doing what we must do even when we don’t want to do it. But may God keep us from living in this mode perpetually. Obedience given to God out of duty will eventually lead to embitterment. The real struggle is to daily remind ourselves of the love that God has for us and then to let that be the motivation for obedience. Let the love of God be the true light in your heart that will guide you through the darkness.

If you are struggling in this season, be encouraged to focus upon the love of and for God. That is the best path forward. We are all called to do hard things, monotonous things, draining things. We should not pretend that a sense of dread doesn’t exist. It is important to be honest with yourselves and with God about what you are feeling. Then remember that He loves you. Christ came into the world to show us what perseverance and sacrifice looks like. And He also shows us what it means to strive for glory in the midst of the darkness, and by doing so, to have peace and assurance.

And beside this, He gives Himself to us constantly in the sacrament which we are about to receive. The bread and the wine, the Body and the Blood of Christ, are tokens of His love and favor to us. Let us receive them with gratefulness. Let us incarnate Christ by remembering that we are 8th day people, the people of new beginnings. And when the darkness is all around, may the light of this Incarnate Word truly shine through us, drawing all men unto Him.

2026-01-04

The Second Sunday after Christmas

K. Bartel, 7

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.