



*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
And the earth was without form and void,
and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

...

*And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good*

These are the first words in the Hebrew Bible – or Old Testament.
They name God as the creator of the whole world,
the one who spoke the world into being,
beginning with light to shine in the darkness.
The whole thing started with a word from God.

When John sat down to tell the story of Jesus,
he had these words from Genesis in mind when he wrote:
*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 has not overcome it.*

For John, the story of Jesus is a new beginning – the dawn of a new creation.
The coming of Jesus changes everything.
And John is very clear – Jesus, the one coming into the world, is God
the very same God who spoke light into being
the very same spirit who moved over the waters of chaos, and got to work

Jesus- the eternal word of God – is the light of the world
Jesus comes into the shadowed and scary places in our lives
the murky places where we struggle to see, struggle to understand,
and shines his light.



Darkness feels especially dark these days –
with stories of gun violence,
especially an anti-semitic mass shooting in Australia
on the first night of hanukkah.

Hate speech is growing, enabled by speech from the white house –
speech which demeans and denies the personhood of other people.
This past week the House of Representatives
moved to deny gender-affirming care to transgender youth across the country.
Such action and the rhetoric around it is painful and even life-threatening
for LGBTQ youth and their families.
Speech from the highest levels of government has called people garbage,
and used slurs to refer to our differently abled siblings.
I saw a particularly poignant video this week, in which dozens of people with
Downs Syndrome shared the message that words matter, and words can hurt.
Speech and action which demeans and dehumanizes people
is not acceptable to us as Christians,
because we know that all people are created good, in the image of God.



Yet light shines – in neighborhoods and communities of faith around the
country.
Grassroots movements of neighbors in Chicago and Charlotte gather
to warn and protect neighbors from ICE,
or at the very least to bear witness to illegal actions.
I hear from pastors around the country about their presence and participation
in protests, even to the point of being arrested
for praying in front of the ICE facility in Chicago.
In Minneapolis, a group of pastors gathered to create a video
affirming the dignity of Somali people and all minority people.

This is light shining in the darkness of bigotry and state violence.
Any time we speak up against illegal detention, we shine a light.
Any time we give time or money to resist corruption
and illegal action of government,
to insist that people of all races and languages are welcome in this country,
that no one is garbage, but each person created in the image of God –
we shine a light
Each time we act with lovingkindness toward our neighbor, we shine a light.



Today we read the story of Christmas according to John.
There are no babies here.
No mangers and shepherds.
No angels or magi following a star.

Instead, John begins by telling us who Jesus is – the word of God
– God’s intention, God’s vision, God’s hope for humanity –
sent into the world in the body of a human.
John tells us that this word incarnate will be light for the world –
and the darkness does not overcome the light.
John tells us that this light incarnate shows us the very person of God
- who makes the unseen God known to us.
And what he makes known is grace upon grace,
a new revelation of God’s love for us,
God’s desire to be in relationship with us and give us abundant life.

That is God’s Christmas promise –
abundant life for all who are drawn to the Word made flesh,
all who live in the light of God’s son,
which is eternal life, now and forever.
Light that shines in the darkness of prejudice and fear,
and shows us the way to be God’s people in the world.

May we know the grace of God which gives us life,
and offer that grace to our neighbors near and far.
May we know the light of Christ in our lives,
and shine that light in the dark places of the world around us.

Amen.