

“Jesus: The Light in the Darkness”

Isaiah 9:1-4, Matthew 4:12-16

January 26, 2014

Rev. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

My wife and I love Point Reyes National Seashore which is located one hour from San Francisco. Every year, we drive down there and enjoy watching the ocean and feeling the nature of God’s work. It is a ‘get-away’ time from the noisy, busy world. I would rather call it a kind of ‘spiritual retreat’. Last year, when my family visited there again, we were able to go to a lighthouse at the seashore. I took a picture of its beautiful scenery. Let me show that picture to you. (‘Lighthouse’ picture on the screen) The image of the lighthouse inspired me with a deep, spiritual meaning about Jesus Christ. How can we fully understand that Jesus, the Son of God, the incarnated God transformed into a human flesh saves us?

The role of a lighthouse is to guide ships to find the right direction for their safe journey, especially at night time. My son Jacob loves to shine a flashlight in the darkness, because he can see what is ahead of him if he holds a flashlight in his hand. Likewise, lighthouses shine light in the darkness and they show ships the right way towards their destination. This metaphor of lighthouses works for understanding God and Jesus Christ in a similar way. In Jewish mysticism tradition, God is understood as the infinite light- the light filled all of existence before the creation. In our Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is often compared to the light in the darkness. Darkness is symbolized as evil, its power and influence, our sins, and the state of absence of God. When Jesus came to us, he brought light into our darkness. In this understanding, Jesus’ death on a cross was a sign of how powerful darkness is in our lives. But the event of resurrection was a great example that God is much stronger than the power of darkness. Darkness cannot defeat even a tiny light. Jesus Christ is our hope and joy even in a despairing and hopeless situation.

We are in the season of Epiphany remembering Christ Jesus as light in the darkness. Epiphany means God’s manifestation or God’s revelation. The Gospel of Matthew especially emphasizes Jesus Christ as a big star. When you look at Matthew Chapter 2, it describes the wise men’s long trip from the East to Bethlehem. In the story of Epiphany, whereas the wise men were diligently searching and asking for the Messiah, King Herod was fearful about the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. King Herod wanted to remove any potential rival to his throne. King Herod symbolized the exclusive attitude of Jewish people towards Gentiles at that time. And the wise

men are a metaphor of those who are in the darkness. As the chosen people, the Jewish people did not share God's love with others. Epiphany, however, is about the story of the new Messiah who has come as light for everyone in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Epiphany reminds us that light has come as hope for those who sit in the darkness of suffering and despair.

Let's think about darkness inside us. This darkness is more about uncertainty, anxiety and fear in our lives. I want to share a prayer of Thomas Merton, Catholic priest and mystic who honestly expressed his personal struggles to God. Listen to his prayer: "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that this desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." In a certain sense, we individuals are lonely ships or boats traveling an unknown ocean of our lives. Sometimes we encounter unexpected challenges, like a storm or heavy rain or a thick fog that we cannot see what is ahead of us. We need guidance for our direction and light to shine our ways. Jesus will not only show us the right direction, but also promises that he will be with us and walk with us for the rest of our life journey. When we receive him as our guide, His light will transform our fear into faith, weakness to strength, hope instead of despair and turn our sorrow into joy. We will travel our journey with trust and confidence in him.

We believers are imitators of Jesus Christ, our genuine light. When we invite Jesus to dwell in us, we will be shining our light to others. What are your lights of Jesus Christ to others? Last Friday, at our preschool chapel time, I shared these reflections of God's lights. I wanted to show the children that they could share the light and love of God with their friends. (pick some rocks for examples.) These were a Smile, Hi, Pray, Joy, Love and Grace. As God has given us the light of welcoming us and embracing us as children of God, we are called to light shadows of darkness with joy, acceptance and love for our neighbors and friends.

Long years ago, I heard a story about a small and rural church in Europe. This church has a unique worship tradition. The congregation members are asked to bring their own candles for lighting the sanctuary instead of electric lights. In the end of each service, the minister reminds people that each of them

is a small light of the world. He continues to say, “As we experience here at our service that we miss one less person this Sunday, the sanctuary became much darker than last Sunday. If you bring your light up to the darkness, the world will become much brighter than now. Go forth and bring your light into every corner of darkness in this world.” We, Christians are invited to be small lights of Christ Jesus. And our church is also commissioned to be the reflection of light to our community. May the Light of Christ shine in your hearts and make his light known and revealed to others through your light in Christ Jesus. Amen.