

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 1:1-18
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 January 4, 2015

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, today is the **Second Sunday of Christmas**. It is part of the twelve days of Christmas that Christian people celebrate. You remember the song, "**On the first day of Christmas**, my true love gave to me, a partridge in a pear tree?" This coming Tuesday, Christmas will end and we will celebrate a day called "**Epiphany**." That is the first day of the **Season of Light**. During Epiphany we remember that Jesus came to be the Light of the World among us. So, Christmas is almost over for another year.

(Unplug the Christmas tree lights.) Has this happened at your house yet? Have the Christmas lights been unplugged and the tree taken down? Why do we have lights on our Christmas trees anyway? Those lights serve as a reminder to us that Jesus is "**The Light of the World**." Jesus comes among us as God's love, light and life shining for us and for all people. The lights on our trees remind us of **Jesus' birth, life, death** and the fact that Jesus is **still with us** in our world this very day.

If our Christmas tree lights are being taken down until next Christmas, how will people remember that Jesus is the Light of the World? **How will people remember** that Jesus is **still shining God's light, life and hope for us all**? We need to be shining God's light, life and hope so that others can see it in us. Then, they too will see Jesus moving in our world and lives. How can we shine for Jesus? When we **love, forgive, help, encourage and support** each other and people out in the world, Jesus' light shines in us and through us! Then, maybe, people will remember that Jesus is with us!

Please help me to sing, "**This Little Light of Mine**." (Adults too?)

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...

- Let it shine **'til Jesus comes**...
- **Hide it under a bushel** no...
- Won't let **Satan woof it out**...

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...

Jesus is the Light of the World. Jesus shines for us and in us. May Jesus shine brightly in your lives and families. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

The article was entitled, “**America’s Only Blind Marching Band Proudly Struts its Stuff.**” The **Ohio State School for the Blind** Marching Band consists of 32 members, each accompanied by a sighted helper. The marching band came into existence in 2005 when the neighboring **Ohio School for the Deaf** started a football program and invited the music department in the blind school to play for their games. Think about this for a second. The blind marching band can’t see themselves marching. The deaf football team can’t hear the band playing. And the football team can’t hear the cheers of their fans! Why bother? I think that the answer has something to do with “**Light**” shining in the darkness.

Our gospel text from John 1:1-5 tells us, “**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.**”

(**See photo** of the flower growing out of a crack in a boulder.) This is how I see the Light of the World. I was walking with my wife during a trip to Arizona to visit her parents. We were in the desert south of Phoenix. I discovered there a single, **tiny, delicate, yellow flower** reaching out into the world from a **narrow crevice/crack** in the middle of a giant rock slab. As you can see in my photo, there is no other sign of life, soil or water nearby. For me that flower blooming there in that difficult place was a **hopeful sign**. The Christmas gospel writers tell us of a tiny, helpless babe born in a barn. He is surrounded by farm animals. He is cared for by first-time parents who are far from home and kin. Very soon this baby and his parents will be literal refugees driven by the king’s soldiers to live in a distant land. The powers and authorities of the world were against him from his birth, to his death and still often oppose him to this very day. All of these circumstances sound like a **cold, hard world** to me. It sounds like Baby Jesus, God’s own Son, was **born between a rock and a hard place**.

Make no mistake; Jesus came into the world as **one of us, a human being**, yet he was **radical beyond our imagining**. Jesus came because our **world without God is deathly dark**. Jesus came as a **flower in a crevice**, as a **light in the darkness**, as One who seeks to bring **life out of death**. Jesus comes to save the world and all people from sin, death and

the power of evil. Have you ever witnessed the “**power of evil?**” Been caught between a rock and a hard place?

John’s gospel goes on, “**(Jesus) was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.**”

The Brainerd radio station, **KUAL, 103.5**, has stopped playing Christmas music. They started way early and actually kept playing carols until New Year’s Day. Almost every station stops playing carols after Christmas Day. Did the folks at KUAL know that people, deep down inside, **yearn to hold onto the Spirit of Christmas as long as they can?** Or, do these radio folks play carols longer at the request of the merchants who hope this music might help sales? What about the station in the Twin Cities that plays Christmas music all year long?

I watched Charles Dickens’ “**Christmas Carol.**” I had forgotten that a big part of Ebenezer Scrooge’s attitude came from the fact that his father was angry and didn’t love Ebenezer. The father had abandoned Ebenezer when his wife died at Ebenezer’s birth. Ebenezer learned to make his own way, survive without human love and to, instead, love money and things.

What about you? Our own kids become much like what they have seen and learned from us. I see this again and again when doing pre-marriage counseling with couples. They answer many questions about **how their family related** with each other when they were raised. Then I ask how they **would like to see their own, new family function** together. Again and again, I see grown men, deep down inside, still trying to **prove themselves to their fathers**. Again and again I see grown women, deep down inside, **living in fear of abandonment** by their husbands. Again and again I see people who are, deep down inside, **unwilling to trust anyone**, to trust **even God**.

There is good news for couples starting new families. These two people have the power to sort through and to **claim all of the good learning** that they have received from their parents and the world. They also have the power to **lay aside all of the less than positive things** that they have

experienced. They have the opportunity to **shape their new family** in the best way possible based upon what they have learned and based upon the loving, life-giving, hopeful presence of the Light of the World. Jesus would like nothing better than to share deep, rich and abundant life with them. So, newlyweds, singles or golden anniversary folks, **why bother with blind marching bands or deaf football teams?** Shall we just take what the world deals out to us and then lie down and die? Or, shall we with God's help receive, live in and **reflect the Light of the World** as fully as we can? Apparently God wasn't satisfied with the world the way it is or Jesus would not have come to save it. Are you satisfied with sin, death and darkness?

Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther saw it like this:

“Anyone who is to find Christ must first find the church. For how can one know where Christ is, and where faith in him is, unless he knew where his believers are? Whoever wishes to know something about Christ must not trust to himself, nor by the help of his own reason build a bridge of his own to heaven, but must go to the church, must visit it, and make inquiry. Now the church is not wood and stone, but the company of people who believe in Christ; he must keep in company with them, and see how they believe, and teach, and live.”

If they come, what will they see of Jesus in this faith community? In 2015, will we sisters and brothers in Christ, **take the best** that we have been given by God and use it to make our world more the way that God intends? Will we **let go of the evil**, hurtful, negative that we have experienced and live in a more Godly way? Will the world be able to see the Light of the World shining in us individually, together as First Lutheran faith family?

Finally, in John 1:16-18, we hear, **“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.”**

We speak this day of a **Babe born in a manger**, a **hopeful flower** growing between a rock and a hard place, **close to the Father's heart**, **Light of the World**, **Brother Jesus** – **your Brother Jesus**... Jesus knows where you live and Jesus shines there for you. Jesus invites you to shine with him. **Are you fortunate enough to hear and to see the marching band playing?** **Will you join in?** Will you **help someone else** to join in as well? **Jesus will.** Thanks be to God. Amen.

