

## A Light Shines in the Darkness- Sermon By Rev. Heidi Champagne 1/3/21

When our youngest daughter Aimee was two, we excitedly redid the room that her sister had inhabited before she moved to another room upstairs. Aimee loved Dora the Explorer, so we painted the trim in her room in hot pink, bright purple and yellow. Around the top of the room was a border with Dora, Swiper, Tico, and Benny. I loved the space we'd created. It was so light and bright--joyful and vibrant.

But just a year later, when one of our older kids moved out, Aimee asked to switch rooms and move into the room next to hers with blue gray trim and a border of horses across the top of the wall. I was crestfallen, both by her rejection of the space I thought was perfect for her and the prospect of painting over those vibrant colors. "Why don't you want to stay in your Dora room?" I cajoled. "I just don't." She answered, perhaps not having the language yet to explain more.

Not only was she adamant about her room change, she began to literally lose sleep over it --and so did we! So we moved her room, and graduated her from a toddler bed into the twin bed that had been her sister's.

Years later, we learned what had driven her from the brightness of that room. Across the hall was a cubby under the stairs. This space houses the ejection pump and has room for storage. Because she slept with her door open, she had a front row seat to this dark cavern. She would look across the hall and imagine shadowy figures and was frightened by the unexplained noise of the ejection pump. And if all that wasn't enough? Benny the cow, Dora's very adorable friend by daylight, had very big, glowing and menacing eyes in the dark--and the border repeated the sequence of characters, and so Benny loomed at her from all parts of the room. While we laugh about it all these years later, it was no laughing matter to lose sleep or to be in fear, or to imagine what lurked in the darkness.

Sometimes we as humans simply don't have the language to express our fears of the dark or our longing for the comfort of a night light.

Our gospel reading today offers us this reading from John. After spending the weeks of Advent and Christmas eve hearing about John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus through the eyes of the writers of Luke and Matthew, this passage from John can feel perplexing. It reads a bit like a riddle. It lacks the poetry of Luke. And where are all the angels and shepherds and wise ones? Where is the manger, and Mary and Joseph? John's account mentions none of this. What it does accentuate is the immensity of God, and the challenges faced by humans trying to conceive of God's vastness. How were our ancestors--how are we to perceive what we can't see, and what we don't have the language to define?

Were you able to watch the video that Courtney and Angela filmed with our Sunday school kids? One of the questions that Angela asked the kids was "what do you think the baby Jesus looked like?" Most agreed that he must have looked just like--well--a baby! In the stories that we pull from to create an annual pageant, there is an emphasis on joy--is there not? Mary beams. Joseph looks on proudly, sheep wander, angels wave to the congregation, shepherds try not to joust with their shepherd crooks. We give a nod to the story of King Herod's jealousy from the book of Matthew, but we stop short of telling the story of Herod's slaughter of the innocents, because as one of our confirmands said last year when we were studying the birth narratives from the gospels-- "that would be a whole different kind of pageant!"

We as Christians struggle sometimes with where our fear and longing fit in our telling of sacred stories. We humans tend to like a neat wrap up, a good ending- a "happily ever after."

We prefer to not acknowledge shadowy figures under the stairs or the glowing eyes of truths that disturb our sleep.

But this reading today from the gospel of John puts words to the fears we can't voice. It gives a nod to the darkness of the world and of our imaginings.

"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."

Notice the choice of language there. Whether translations mixed up the tense or whether it was the original intent of the writer, we have an interesting use of present and past tense. Light shines (present tense) in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.(past tense.) God's light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. It feels a bit to me as though God gets the last word.

This week Epiphany falls mid week. Epiphany is our observance of the coming of the Magí to visit the baby Jesus in Matthew's telling of the story. As Christians, we take time to reflect on the light of Christ and the guiding light that led the wise ones to the holy birth and leads us all toward the God of our understanding.

For several years now, this church has engaged in the tradition of sharing Epiphany star words. Each person is invited to take a star. On that star is a word and a guiding scripture for the coming year. As you leave today, you will be invited to take a star. In the dark days of January, as we wrestle with our fears in this pandemic, I hope your star will offer some guidance when the darkness under the stairs seems daunting. A light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Amen.