

**The Joy of Christmas**  
**John 1:6-8, 19-28**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**December 13, 2020**

Arizona businessman Stephen Shadeeg tells of one Christmas morning when his 7-year-old son, David, burst into Stephen's bedroom screaming, "Daddy! Mother! Come quick! I saw it!" As they wiped the sleep from their eyes, he and his wife knew what had happened. The no-speaking rule had been broken. David had already discovered the new bicycle he had been wanting for two years. They felt cheated, that they had missed seeing his discovery.

But it was Christmas after all and they couldn't scold him for being overanxious. So they climbed out of bed and pulled on their robes, and David took them by the hand and dragged them down the hall. They were led down the stairs and through the darkened living room toward a window on the eastside of the house. Turns out, their son hadn't even notice the bicycle beside the Christmas tree. Instead, he pointed his little finger to the eastern sky and said, "Look! The Star of Bethlehem! I've seen the star!"<sup>1</sup>

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him." That Christmas morning at Stephen and his wife's house, their son David became a witness to the light of Christ, testifying in word and deed to the true joy of Christmas. What do we witness and testify to at Christmastime? Do we see the light of Christ shining into a darkened world, or do we only see visions of the gifts Santa will bring us?

Do we only see that never-ending list of things that have to get done – Christmas cards, shopping, baking and cooking, cleaning and decorating – all of it cluttering up our already, way-too-busy schedules. How will it all get done? Or maybe all we see is what's not there – no family visits this year, no toasting the holidays with friends, no in-person worship, and all of it adding to the pain and loss of a steady paycheck for some, declining health for others, and for still others, loved ones gone too soon.

Many people understandably do have trouble seeing the light of Christ at Christmastime, and especially this year, 2020. And yet, the true star of Christmas does shine, and there are people who need help to see it, and there is us – you and me and all who know in our heart-of-hearts the true meaning of Christmas. God shines his light in us and through us to help others see past their to-do lists; past the struggle, pain and loss of this year; past the darkness of 2020 to the light of Christ's promise, the promise of Christmas joy now and in the year to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved Dec. 9, 2020, at <https://www.peninsulaclarion.com/life/ministers-message-remembering-the-greatest-gift-of-all-on-christmas/>

How do we become that light of Christmas joy for others who just don't see it? How do we become like John the Baptist, "... the voice of one (the voices of many) crying out in the wilderness..." so that others can see Jesus coming into view, coming into the world, shining the light of joy into the darkness of despair?

To become a herald of Christ's light like John we need to look at what took place around the time of John, when he was baptizing in the wilderness. When the Pharisees sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?," the first thing John did was point to the coming joy of the Lord. John is not even identified as "the Baptist" in the Gospel of John. Instead, he consistently shifts the focus away from baptism and toward Jesus. John has one function in this gospel, and one function only: to witness to Jesus, saying, "I am not the Messiah. ... Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me."

By referring to Jesus as the one who is coming into the world, John is calling for a change in this world, a change of heart and mind that allows people to see past their to-do lists, their overwhelming struggles and the current darkness we live in. This change of heart and mind that John calls for began with the Pharisees, priests and Levites of his time. The Pharisees were the keepers of religious law, the Levites were the keepers of the Temple – the place of worship – and the priest were the intermediaries between God and the people, the go-betweens.

This change of heart and mind John calls for began with the Pharisees, priest and Levites some 2,000 years ago, and it continues with us today. We need to reorient ourselves and our world away from religious law and more toward spiritual growth, away from Temple keeping and more toward keeping of the faith, away from those things that get in between us and God and more toward those words and deeds, thoughts and prayers that bring us into relationship with God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Simply stated, we need to continually be making that shift from receiving to giving, from ruling to serving, from the waiting of Advent to the celebration of Christmas, from being on the sidelines to getting in the game, from the darkness of our misguided ways to basking in the light of Christ and the hope, peace and joy he brings.

This Christmas is one in which many people will not receive as much as they did in years past, when it comes to presents. I mean, people just don't have the money, and on top of that, those extended-family gatherings just aren't happening.

And yet, instead of worrying about what we don't have this year – what's not coming – let us shine light on what we do have, what's already here – the love of family and friends, the desire to be together that bridges the miles between us, and our ability to share the hope of Christ with those

who sit in darkness, through cards and phone calls and social media, prayers and a helping hand where needed.

Instead of being like the Pharisees and worrying about who's in charge – who's ruling the roast – at work, at school and across this nation, let us recognize and embrace Christ as the ruler of all nations – all people – and the shepherd of our faith.

Instead of being like the priests and Levites who limited access to God and the church, let us throw open the doors of our hearts, so that all may see the light of Christ, a light that shines brightly even this holiday season.

This week, let us be thinking about and praying about what mindset we need to change, what areas in our hearts we need to soften in order to help others see and experience and celebrate the true star of Christmas, which brings true joy to the world.

And as that blessed morning draws nearer, let us follow the true star of Christmas, the Christmas star that appears each year in the eastern night-sky, the Christ star in whose light people are able to see past their to-do lists, their overwhelming struggles and the current darkness of this world, and claim for themselves and all the world the light of Jesus, which gives us an eternal and abiding sense of hope, peace and joy. Amen.