Light from Light

December 31, 2006 (First Sunday after Christmas)

Isaiah 61:10-62:3 Psalm 147 Galatians 3:23-25;4:4-7 John 1:1-18

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,

The ancient greeks had a peculiar belief about the way we saw the world. You see (so to speak), the ancients believed that our eyes sent out these special rays, which went out and bounced off the things we were looking at. The reflection of those rays back to our eyes is what let us see things.

It's easy to prove they were right. Watch this: If I close my eyes, everything disappears! Of course, they don't disappear for you, but if we all closed our eyes at the same time, everything would vanish, reappearing only once one of us opened our eyes. Amazing!

Think about this! Some of the smartest people of their time, for *centuries*, completely **misunderstood** how we see.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

This ancient theory of vision puts our selves at the very *center* of the universe: If we close our eyes, the whole world disappears. It is an awesome power, but a childish idea.

We believe it when we are infants – there's an age when kids try to hide by closing their eyes, and a stage when infants believe that the things they can't see have ceased to exist.

As we grow older, we grow out of this narrow view of the visible world. But we especially believe it about God, that it is in our control to make God exist or not exist.

The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light; yet the world did not know the light.
Closing our eyes, we do not **see** the light, and we can believe the light is not there. If we are at the *center* of the universe, this would mean that the light itself would disappear!

Thanks be to God, that's not how the universe works.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

It wasn't until Al-Haytham, a 10th-century muslim scholar from Basra, Iraq, before someone first described how we *really* see.\ His work in optics began to prove what we now thing of as *obvious*, that light reflects off of objects and is focused by the lens in our eye.

Independent of our own existence, consciousness or will, light **is.** And the source of all light, **is.**

Now it would be easy to turn this into a guilt-trip from the pulpit. You might hear that wolf scratching on the door, whispering: how *dare* you not believe in God! But this light of God is **good news**, not a guilt-trip.

For every one of us, there is a time when we feel we cannot see God, that God has gone from a blinding light of faith to a half-forgotten after-image that is already fading away. Sometimes it's a passing moment, sometimes it can be *years*. It's been both for me, nearly five years when I did not believe in God, and almost every week still, that fear returns for a few moments until I push it away.

I'm quite sure that the author of the Gospel of John knew this feeling. He (or she?) writes about the light with such passion and

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complexity, that I am sure he know the darkness of doubt as well as the light of faith.

"No one," he writes, "No one has ever seen God."

The good news is this: You do not have to believe in God, you do not have to be confident in a constant vision of the Divine, in order for God to exist.

You do not have to see God, for God to see you. You do not have to behold the light, for that light to burn within your own heart. In all those times of darkness and uncertainty, it helps to remember that God *can see you,* ***no matter what.***

Nearly 3 million Muslims are in Mecca today, completing the Hajj, the great pilgrimage of Islam. It is an exercise in seeking God, and an inspiration for all people of faith, a physical exercise of humility and pursuit for the God of mercy, the God who always sees us, even when we are groping blindly for God with our eyes closed.

As Christians, we remember a particular pilgrimage this coming week, the pilgrimage of the Magi to the Christ child. We will enter the season of Epiphany; the word is Greek, meaning "The Appearance," and celebrates the 'shining forth' of God.

You are invited in this time to take that walk of pilgrimage, seeking God in the wilderness, listening for the voices of angels, looking for the light of the star, ignoring the lies of kings and powers and listening to the stories of poor shepherds.

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made God known.
(John 1:18)

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