How was your Christmas? I’ll bet you have been asked that question many times over the past few days. In fact, I was at the grocery store yesterday morning and overheard this conversation between the person in front of me and the cashier.

*“How was your Christmas?”*, asked the cashier.

*“Good, but I’m glad it’s over.”*

*“Me too, such a rush and then it’s gone.”*

I was so sad to hear that exchange. As I followed the moving belt brought my purchases before the register, the cashier looked up at me,

*“How was your Christmas?”*

I said, *“My Christmas is going just fine, thanks. How about yours?”*

I’m so happy that today is Christmas I, the first Sunday of Christmas in our church calendar. I’m just not ready to say goodbye to Christmas just yet. I still play the music and turn on the lights outside our home. I think the lights are my favorite part of our Christmas traditions. I love the homes that are simply lit, one candle in each window, just like our beautiful church campus. It’s so very New England, so New Hampshire, so Christmas; our little church shining in the darkness here in Peterborough.

It is true; I’m not good at letting go of Christmas. I think that’s one reason why I am so attracted to the Prologue of the Gospel of John we read this morning. There are no shepherds or angels, no cattle sheds or wise men to be found. There is no baby, no Mary, no Joseph. John feels no need to place Jesus in a specific time and place of birth for us to mark on a calendar page. We aren’t compelled to post “Happy Birthday Jesus” messages on social media.

One of my professors in seminary, Larry Wills, calls John the “Episcopal Gospel” and I suppose he is right. This beautiful and enigmatic poem that leads us into the book grabs us by the very core of our curious and intellectual natures and does not let us go. This past fall Jamie led a Bible study of John and suggested for us that the central question this gospel asks is, “who is Jesus to and for you?” This journey with Jesus is a very personal one, lived out grace upon grace as beings in and of God’s creation.

From John we come to understand….., the Incarnation is not the celebration of a past event, a moment of long ago. It is both the culmination of a plan long conceived, born of light shining in the darkness, and a moment in the present and future of God and of all that is and will be. The reality for us is that Jesus, our Emmanuel, the very Word, became flesh and lived among us. This is one of those times where I miss the King James Version where we hear that “the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us.”

Dwelt among us. The translated word from the Greek translation is skenoo (ske no o), to pitch or live in a tent or tabernacle, denoting much more than the mere general notion of dwelling. According to M. Vincent[[1]](#footnote-1), *“For the Christian, skenoo is dwelling in intimate communion with the resurrected Christ – even Christ who lived in unbroken communion with the Father during the days of his flesh.”*

This is one of the two times that this Greek word skenoo is used in John’s gospel. The other is when we hear of the disciple who Jesus loved, who reclined next to him at table during the Last Supper. In the reading from John today Jesus is a son, held close to God’s heart, intimate and nourished, as a mother with a child at her bosom; God’s mercy and love flowing to “what was his own” through Christ.

God’s claim on us is so very deeply intimate. In the introduction to his book The Rebirthing of God, John Philip Newell tells of a Celtic tradition that grew from this description of the beloved disciple leaning on the chest of the Lord, listening to the very heartbeat dwelling with God. By leaning on and listening to the Sacred, Newell suggests we might grow in awareness that we too are bearers of God’s transformation in the world, ourselves carriers of Light.

Though we are now past the longest night of the year and each day gets a bit brighter each day, I have to admit I like the mornings a bit darker. I actually missed coming here in the dawning light this morning. Coming up over the mountain as light just begins to bubble up behind the dark silhouettes of the trees, illuminating the shimmering snow is a breathtaking sight! The darkness makes the arrival of light so much more meaningful. In this I am reminded that Christ dwells with us in the darkness as well as in the light.

Many religions and cultures celebrate festivals of lights during the darkest days of the season. As wise folk theologian Arlo Guthrie once offered, *“You can’t have light without a dark to put it in.”* This is one of those seasons where sparks of light may seem to be threatened by a darkness that overcomes. But there are moments that shine through, if even for brief periods.

I was reminded of one of those events in our world history as I watched the *Doctor Who Christmas Special* this week. Part of the story was set during WW I as British and German soldiers faced each other across muddy battlefield in Flanders, Belgium. It was 1914 and only a few months into the war. It was Christmastime and the men lay in man-made trenches. They were tired and dispirited, bogged down in conflict.

All of a sudden British troops observed German soldiers putting small trees decorated with candles outside their trenches. As Christmas carols started to rise from the German trenches, signs appeared on both sides “You no fight, we no fight” and “Merry Christmas” in German and English.

Author Stanley Weintraub writes,

“A spontaneous truce resulted. Soldiers left their trenches, meeting in the middle to shake hands. The first order of business was to bury the dead who had been previously unreachable because of the conflict.

Then, they exchanged gifts. Chocolate cake, cognac and tobacco. In a few places, along the trenches, soldiers exchanged rifles for soccer balls and began to play games.

It didn’t last forever. In fact, some of the generals didn’t like it at all and commanded their troops to resume shooting at each other. After all, they were in a war. Soldiers eventually did resume shooting at each other, but only after, a few days of wasting rounds of ammunition shooting at stars in the sky instead of soldiers in the opposing army across the field.”

Weintraub continues…

“For a few precious moments there was peace on earth good will toward men. All because the focus was on Christmas. Happens every time. There’s something about Christmas that changes people. It happened over 2000 years ago in a little town called Bethlehem. It’s been happening over and over again down through the years of time. This year, Lord willing, it will happen again.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

On a more contemporary note…… each year Google publishes a listing of it’s top searches.

I looked at 2017 and found many of the searches focused on:

* People behaving badly
* Natural disasters
* Making sense of violence

But interestingly enough, when I looked at searches starting with the interrogative “How”, I found questions like:

* How can I help Puerto Rico?
* How can I calm a dog during a storm?
* How do I make a protest sign?
* How can I be a strong woman?

Dear friends, Christmas is just getting started for us. Just as with Creation, the Incarnation is ever taking place and unfolding for us. God continues to shine a light in our darkness, which is Christ the Lord, the true light that radiates hope and love and truth. Jesus is born to us, not just in a manger but here and now! Christ is witness to our new birth. The implications of living in the Light are wide and profound. Asking “how” each day changes all we do, and see, and are. Let us, in these days, look beyond the trenches of our society for the lights twinkling in the trees sitting on the edges and the music of Christmas that rises above them. And let this be our Christmas story…..

*“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.” ( Jn 1:1-5)*

1. Biblehub.com (http://biblehub.com/greek/4637.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. snopes.com (

   <https://snopes.com/holidays/christmas/truce.asp)> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)