

12/24/10 Sermon

"Light Universal" (Christmas Eve Candlelight Service)
Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

This is a night and a season of music filled with hope that stirs the soul and gladdens the heart. Tonight sparks a longing for a new bright day amidst the dim lights of winter. John the Baptist cried, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" His words orient our Christian friends and members to attention to the future kingdom of God that is coming.

This is the hope at the heart of Christmas.

Hope is our ability to imagine a better, more peaceful and healing future. Hope gives us the confidence that we can bring forth the light of the world out of darkness. When those we love have been beset by trauma, grief and resentment, we know they are unable to look forward with hope. Often all they can imagine is further loss and pain. They stumble in the dark, seeking the light of hope and love universal. It is to these people and to all others gathered here tonight I offer the hope of the light of life – a re-birth, a renewal – the birth of the baby Jesus and of love, embodied in this congregation and within all faith traditions across this fragile planet, throughout the centuries.

For Christians, this season starts with light – a bright star – a guiding light that leads us who are blind to hope, and three wise men through the cold desert night to find a child in a manger who will bring about the peaceable kingdom of love and hope. For that same reason, Jews light the Shamash (lead candle) on the Menorah as a harbinger of hope that was to fill the world with light for eight days, and to bring forth a nation born in freedom.

This is the season of joy, worthy of celebration whether it is Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa for our African-American family, Winter Solstice for our Pagan friends, and Diwali for East Asian Indian neighbors. All are celebrations of the light universal and hope without constraints.

In this season, we are likely more aware of the contrast between light and dark. The days will now grow longer even as the cold continues into spring. There is beauty and glory in both. The total eclipse of the moon and the meteor shower just past is a demonstration of the balance of light and dark – the universe at its most spectacular.

I remember lying on a beach once, long ago, in the Caribbean, covered only by a blanket of stars so numerous that I was awed into silence. Nights like

that, so rare, instill in us an appreciation of the stars, the planets and the mystery and majesty of the universe. We all can revel in the searing lights of the sky and the dense darkness of the night.

On Solstice Eve, the longest night of the year, with that magnificent eclipse, the first one on that day in 400 years, we were awed by the encroaching dark but yearned too for the light to return. Like primitives of old, this eclipse reminded us of the importance of darkness.

It was written, "Let us bless the mushrooms that grow in the dark and honeysuckle that sends its luscious scents into the night. Be grateful for the darkness that soothes us to sleep, the darkness that animals require for hibernation. Give thanks for sheltering dark places: the rich earth where seeds germinate, the caves that harbored our ancient ancestors (and where some of our sun gods were born), the cellars that keep us safe from tornadoes, the wombs that provided our first nourishment. Let us acknowledge the darkness of suffering, which can deepen our appreciation of life and light and strengthen our connection to one another."

How fortunate we are to be part of this web of wonder. How blessed to be here tonight with all of you to celebrate the birth of a child of hope – offering the possibility for a world free of hunger and war, pestilence and homelessness. How lucky we are to be here together tonight as we light the candles of silent night and prepare to welcome the dawning of a new day with the sunrise where love is reborn in a manger.

Let us sing hallelujah, and say amen at the birth of Jesus, a child of hope, and the dawning of the Light Universal.

Blessed be!