

John 1:1-5

For the past several months at our house my 2 youngest children – ages 3 and 5 – have decided they must sleep with a light on all night. The fear of the dark has come in full force and run of the mill night lights just won't cut it anymore. I worry how the light affects their sleep, but for now, this is the new norm and they take great comfort in having the lights on and now fall asleep much faster. We humans are naturally drawn to the light and seek out the light – we know and sense the safety that light brings. As a parent, I know the safety light brings in the night when I attempt to walk through my son's room barefoot – because, as you probably know, stepping on Legos is a unique and special kind of torture. So yes, the light helps.

Every Sunday we state in our creed, "Light from light, true God from true God" -as we describe Jesus- but what does that really mean? The prologue to the Gospel of John that we just read speaks about this concept of light: the arrival of the Word, the Logos, into the world. It is the light of all people-this light of God shines in the darkness and, it says, the darkness did not overcome it. It is the "true light, which enlightens everyone."

And light has always been associated with the Divine, from the very opening words in Genesis, "Let there be light" to the story of Moses' encounter with God on Mt. Sinai. When God passed by Moses on the mountain, Moses' face shined brilliantly for many days, reflecting the light of God to the people. And then, as Jesus comes into the world, he is called the light of the world, the bearer of truth, making God known to humanity. Light itself is an important part of our winter liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. In fact, light is a theme that pervades world religions and cultures at this "dark" time of the year when the sun goes down early. Light is an important spiritual concept in every religious tradition. At baptism (which we will have for the Saglimbene and Huerta families) we light the Paschal candle and give the baptized a baptism candle – reminding them of the light of Christ that shines in their lives forever.

And it's not just the Bible that begins with light – the universe itself began with light –after the Big Bang scientists tell us the universe was filled with light as it began to form and that this original light can still be observed– it's called the "Cosmic Microwave

Background." Light is essential to life on earth – without the sun, our own star, there would be no plant and animal life and certainly no humans. The light of the sun is necessary for us throughout our whole lives – it impacts our mood by lifting our sense of wellbeing, it reduces stress, it eases pain, it provides the necessary Vitamin D we need through our skin- essential to bone health and growth, and it even impacts human fertility. And light is the great revealer. Things can only remain hidden if they remain in the dark. The light dispels the darkness, it chases away darkness...darkness is helpless in the presence of light. We use words that describe light's ability to reveal the truth in our language. We say we have "come out of the closet" when we finally reveal something deeply true about ourselves and who we are. We speak of bringing things "out into the light" when we reveal the truth, often with the purpose of bringing healing and reconciliation. We say, "I finally see the light" when we gain clarity and understanding. We say, "The future is bright" to describe a future hope. So yes, for us, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

But we don't always want to be in the presence of the light, sometimes we prefer the dark, to keep things hidden for fear of something we don't want revealed. Flor McCarthy describes the Simon Community who run night-shelters in England and writes. "Each night volunteers bring soup and sandwiches to those who, for one reason or another, do not want to come to the shelters. They go looking for them in derelict buildings and such places. The most important aid they take with them is a torch (a flash light), because often there is no light where the down-and-outs live. Most of the down-and-outs receive the volunteers as friends. But some refuse to have anything to do with them. The volunteers can tell at once which group they are dealing with by their reaction to the light. Some welcome the light. Others fear it. You could say that the light judges them, in the sense that it shows up the darkness in their lives... – But it doesn't come to judge them. It comes as a friend, to brighten up their lives, to comfort them."

I am familiar with the desire to keep things hidden in the dark at times – and it's usually fear that prevents me, or any of us, from bringing things out into the light: Fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of having to face a reality we don't feel prepared to deal with, fear we won't be loved if we speak the truth about who we are, or fear that we will be judged. We think that keeping things secret and in the dark will protect us – but that's

not really the case. You may have heard the saying, "We're only as sick as our secrets." We need the light and we can step out into the light without fear – because God's light does not come in judgment of us but in love, to guide us into truth and to enlighten us with the knowledge of God's grace. This is the Christmas story – the Word became flesh and dwelt among us to bring us God's light and glory and to grant us grace upon grace. We do not need to fear the light. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

As we approach a new year – 2019 – it is a good time to step out into the light and to let the light shine in the dark places of our hearts and fears. In this coming year, whatever we may have been hiding or hiding from, we are encouraged by the Gospel to bring it to light. Whether it's a medical exam or tests we've been putting off, a concern we need to share with a friend or loved one, a secret we ought to reveal, an addiction or behavior it's time to confront, a denial about a situation we're in, or a truth about ourselves we need to share – we can do so with God's help. The light of God is the light of love and healing, it shines – and the darkness did not overcome it.

There's a story about a cave who lived under the ground, as caves have the habit of doing. It had spent its lifetime in darkness. One day it heard a voice calling to it, "Come up into the light; come and see the sunshine." But the cave retorted, "I don't know what you mean. There isn't anything but darkness." Finally, the Cave was convinced to venture forth. He was amazed to see light everywhere and not a speck of darkness anywhere. He felt oddly warm and happy. Turnabout was fair play and so, looking up to the Sun, the Cave said, "Come with me and see the darkness." The Sun asked, "What is darkness?" The Cave replied, "Come and see!" One day the Sun accepted the invitation. As it entered the Cave it said, "Now show me your darkness." But there was no darkness! (Quiet Times for Teens, 2003, pg. 154).

A new year and a new day is dawning in our lives – the light has come into the world and has dwelt among us – the light shines for us – and the darkness did not overcome it.

Amen.