

*First United Methodist Church
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La Nativité by Nicolas Mignard

Christmas 2018

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

*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.*

*He came to what was his own,
and his own people did not accept him.*

*But to all who received him,
who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,*

*who were born,
not of blood
or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man,*

but of God.

- John 1.5, 9-13

On the Mystery of the Incarnation

*It's when we face for a moment
the worst our kind can do, and shudder to know
the taint in our own selves, that awe
cracks the mind's shell and enters the heart:
not to a flower, not to a dolphin,
to no innocent form
but to this creature vainly sure
it and no other is god-like, God
(out of compassion for our ugly
failure to evolve) entrusts,
as guest, as brother,
the Word.*

- Denise Levertov

I have written before about the first 18 verses of John's gospel being the "nativity story" as John so wonderfully tells it. I wanted to set beside a part of that story the above poem by Denise Levertov in order to ponder the true wonder of Christmas. Her words impact my mind and my heart and my soul with the darkness of the world into which God sent his son, contrasting so eloquently with the bright hope of the light which has come into that dark world; that light which the darkness has not, does not, and will not ever overcome.

Levertov's words remind me of my own deep need for the Word, the Word of which John reminds us that "his own people did not accept him." The interplay between the poem and the gospel is a sobering call to repentance. I ponder my own vanity in which I assumed myself god-like, indeed, even supplanted God with myself: my own pride, control, ability, and power, as well as my wants, needs, desires. How frequently my "self" becomes so inflated that it leaves no room for the guest, the brother, the Word! How frequently this distorted "self" devolves into the petty passions of jealousy, anger, and hatred, not to mention fear, guilt, shame, and self-loathing, for even these last four expand within the soul to such extent as to leave no space for guest, brother, or Word.

How wonderful is this proclamation of John, for light requires no room. Light shines in the darkness. Light finds its way through the slimmest of cracks in the façade of self like the sun's rays through bedroom blinds early on a summer's morning. Light grows and brightens until there is no darkness to be found at all. In the same way, the Incarnation finds its way into our souls, bit by bit, as guest, as brother, the Word.

Come and celebrate "*the true light which enlightens everyone*", the gift of God to a dark world filled with "the worst that our kind can do...the taint in our own selves." Come and celebrate the light which "*shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*" Come and receive the gift of God anew, that we all may "*become children of God, who were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*"

*Come and celebrate the Christ at our Christmas Eve Service
with Communion and Candlelight at 7 PM on Monday,
December 24, 2018!*

By His Grace,

Pastor Tom