Grace and Peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I talked about last week, the lessons last week and this week are from the medieval idea that Christmas lasts twelve days, and so in some years there are two Sundays of the Christmas season before Epiphany, including this year and today is the twelfth day of Christmas. After the cacophony of activity and stress focused on Christmas day because of commercialization, which creates stress and anxiety in and of itself, this is a good to gather with family and friends at Christmas, these twelve days are an appropriate time for Christmas concerts and church parties. Many people use their vacation time days during this time between Christmas and New Years. I think of it as a time to decompress from the busy time from Thanksgiving to Christmas day. Each of these two Sundays we can focus on yet another aspect of the mystery of the incarnation. Because of God’s love and action for us Christmas is not “over”—Christ is born in the hearts of believers each day. Last week we started by hearing how Jesus had grown in faith and wisdom but at age twelve told his concerned parents when he went missing, he was in his Father’s house – the Temple where God was felt to be present for the Israelites. This showed he had a grasp of his identity i.e. the Son of God even though he had a heavenly father in Joseph but obediently returned home with his parents where he continued to grow in faith and wisdom until he was ready to start his ministry and re-emerged as he began his ministry. This ministry began when he was heralded and then baptized by John the Baptist who asked for repentance and was uncompromising along with being obedient to God’s wishes. This Sunday we hear another John, the apostle son of Zebedee and brother of James “the son of Thunder”: who tells us the narrative of Jesus from the beginning. Unlike the synoptic gospels John, who has obviously grown in wisdom since wanting God to rein fire down upon the enemies. There are obvious differences with the synoptic gospels of Mark, Luke and Mathew, John’s narrative does not include narrative on the birth of Christ, there is no temptation in the desert nor is there a baptism. John wants us to see Jesus as unique as God’s Son-yet he is fully God and wants us to see that Jesus can enlighten us on who God is very clearly and accurately. John later tells us Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life. As God’s Son we can trust in what he says. This trust allows us to gain an open mind to understand God’s message and fulfill his purpose in our lives. This is written to build our faith and confidence in Jesus so we can believe that he was and is truly God’s Son and is the way to eternal life. John’s gospel starts out laying out in a prologue of the story of creation in these first 18 verses as an introduction which gives us the background to the powerful story of what is to come. The Greeks used prologues to give the mythological background which helps the listener to understand the events in the play. This gives us the setting, previews the characters and establishes the primary theme and message. John’s theme and message throughout his Gospel is Jesus is the Son of God.  John states this from the beginning. John 1:1-2 says 1“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.” The Word was with God from the beginning. Then John tells us the Word became flesh and lived among us. This is Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the Word. Jesus is fully human and fully God. John’s prologue is mindful of the opening of the Old Testament in Genesis 1:1-3 1*In the beginning God created*] the heavens and the earth, **2**the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from Godswept over the face of the waters. **3**Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” When God said let there be light, he used words. Jesus is the Word and is with God at the beginning and God’s very Spirit made this happen. John told us all things came into being through the Word (Christ). Without Christ or God’s speaking the Word nothing comes into being. It is through Christ that life came through him and the light is the light of all people.  Not all believe but to all who believe in his name, he gives power to become children of God, co-inheritors of the kingdom as we are born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. This light defeats darkness. The law condemns and was given through Moses while grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. There is always evil in the world. The evil is too pervasive for us to deal with so God intervenes. Think about the dark acts of the massacre in New Orleans and the car bomb in Vegas and senseless acts that take innocent lives which effects families, friends and the community. Some people prefer to live in darkness. They wish to take things like a vigilante in their own hands and to right a wrong. Jesus talked about 2 disasters in Luke 13: a massacre in a nearby town and the fall of the Tower of Siloam. He tells the followers that tragedies do not have meaning or purpose. They simply part of us being human in this broken, yet beautiful world. We too have that capability in our brokenness. Buddhists would say “life is suffering” and we cannot escape that truth, no matter how hard we try, but we choose the light through Christ. The truth of Christ is love of God wins over evil. These evil people may have taken lives but Jesus defeated the ultimate evil Satan. Satan does not have the last word and these folks can live forever with Christ.

Recently we had the longest night of darkness but even though light increases it can seem the darkness is winning over the light. In 2007 one of the world’s greatest violinists, Joshua Bell, teamed up with the *Washington Post* for a [social experiment](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnOPu0_YWhw) in Washington D.C. Normally, Bell is the kind of musician who could sell out an entire theatre, but instead he took his multi-million-dollar instrument and stationed himself outside a busy Metro station to play for spare change. Those who ran the experiment assumed that in the forty-five minutes he planned to play, seventy-five to a hundred people might stop to listen, and perhaps forty would recognize who he was. In fact, more than a thousand people passed by Bell, and only seven stopped to listen. Of the seven, only *one* person recognized his identity. (That’s as crushing as showing a picture of a person with a brief statement and none of the contestant’s get it right.) Regardless of one’s ability to spot a classical music celebrity in the wild, one thing is clear: rarely do we pause to recognize the extraordinary beauty that surrounds us. We are so busy, so distracted, so numb, especially susceptible through a secular Christmas that we cannot recognize the sacred in our midst. That is why it is incumbent on us to share the light with others and let folks know we have hope, even when times are the darkest. Think of the darkest time in your life.

The promise of hope comes to us in current times, not in the form of an infant as on Christmas Eve but in this form of light. Even though we may not recognize this life we are asked to not only to search but celebrate with others the pure radiant light that cuts through the darkness of this world and shines into our shadow-filled lives. This is the light that shines through our brokenness and is present in the bread and wine. This light is the presence of Christ in times of confusion and despair. Consider events which I talked about this past week. The massacre in New Orleans, the exploding vehicle in Las Vegas, another mass shooting along with other events. We can see darkness in these actions. So where is our hope? It is the light of grace and truth shining into lives young and old, rich and poor, broken and whole. Let’s share the light. Amen.