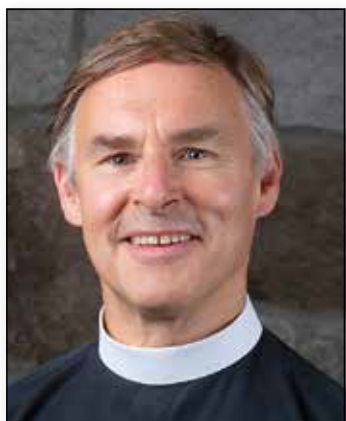


THE CALL

ST. ANDREW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

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Christ's Light Calls Us



The Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole

"THE LIGHT THAT SHINES in the Darkness," from John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 5, is the theme of this edition of *The Call*, as we enter the Advent and Christmas seasons. This beloved verse from the Prologue of John's Gospel speaks of the incarnation of the Word in Christ. The full text reads, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." These words express the heart of the Christmas hope: that God's presence endures with us, whatever life may bring. We celebrate this promise each year as we light our Advent candles and illuminate our Christmas trees.

As I reflected on the truth that Christ's light shines not only in our celebrations but also in the realities

of our daily lives, I was reminded of conversations I've had with the Rev. John Kegi, a 94-year-old retired Episcopal priest in Wellesley to whom I bring communion each month. John, who was a scientist before being ordained later in life, belongs to the Anglican Society of Ordained Scientists. Recently he shared with me that, scientifically speaking, darkness is not a reality but rather the absence of light. Light consists of photons; darkness exists when there are too few. In spiritual terms, darkness arises when we do not allow the light of Christ to enter our lives.

John told me a story from his childhood that deeply moved me which he gave me permission to share. He grew up in Latvia during the Second World War. As Stalin's Soviet forces invaded, his family—who were upper middle class and likely targets of the communists—knew their lives were in danger. Amid fear and chaos, John's grandfather suddenly called out, "Everyone, get on your knees and we will say the Lord's Prayer." They knelt in the dining room and prayed. John recalled that, as they prayed, a calmness descended on them, and they knew what to do to escape safely. Into their darkness, the light of Christ had entered.

This story reminds me that Christ's light can enter any situation, no matter how dark—if we invite it. But that invitation requires our response. John's family prayed, and then they acted. In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, when Scrooge encounters the light of the Spirit of Christmas shining into his own darkness, he too responds—by becoming a beacon of love and generosity to others.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, once preached a sermon called "The Ray of Darkness." He describes the paradox of Christ's light: it is both comforting and disruptive. It reassures us of God's presence, especially in times of darkness, yet it also exposes our selfishness and indifference, calling us to repentance and renewal.

This Christmas, may that same divine light shine in us and through us—comforting, guiding, and transforming us—so that it might be said of our lives: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

May you have a very happy Christmas,

Photo: Katharine Clark



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Warden's Letter

Light Transforms Us



Ginny Snow, warden

EACH YEAR, ON DECEMBER 22, our family travels to Wisconsin to celebrate Christmas with my side of the family. Except for three times, we've never missed a Christmas or Christmas Eve in Whitefish Bay where I grew up.

A highlight of our five-day holiday visit is attending the 10pm Christmas Eve service at Christ Church. As with most Christmas Eve services, music is a central part. We sing the beloved well-known hymns throughout the service—a tradition that I cherish. As we begin *Silent Night*, the wonderful mystery of music is at its peak. Incense floats down the aisles, lights are gradually dimmed, and a quiet transformation begins as we are left in darkness. One by

one, white candles are lit—passed hand to hand, pew to pew until hundreds of tiny flames held by each parishioner glow throughout the sanctuary.

The effect is magical. Darkness and light. Silence and song. The warm glow of candles—bright, steady, pure—is mystical. As the congregation begins to sing this sacred hymn, I am always overcome by the beauty of the voices, the symbol of hope in the candlelight, and the knowledge that around the world, millions of Christians join together on this night in celebration of Christ's birth.

Upon the final verse, the organ falls silent, leaving only our voices as we sing together in a shared sentiment of love and gratitude:

*Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*

We leave the church reminded that Jesus, the Light of the World (John 8:12), will be our guide throughout our lives.

Wishing you and your families a very Merry Christmas, filled with peace, joy, and hope.



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The Darkness Cannot Overcome It



The Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS are often full of joy and merriment, but the core promise of Christmas is this promise: Christ came into the world to bring abundant life and abundant love. Always. In gracious days and in hard ones. When merriment is easy, and when life is full of challenges.

The cosmic truth we treasure in this season is the birth of Christ, and the way the world has never been the same since. Western culture has privileged the virtues of kindness, integrity, mercy, and justice making, and many other life-giving virtues,

because its foundations rest upon our Judeo-Christian principles, the ones Jesus and our holy scripture teach us.

As a clergyperson, I'm always aware that every year some families in our parish experience easy Christmases, while at the same time some other families in our parish celebrate the holidays in the face of illness, or chronic pain, or grief, or another tough family challenge. It is my privilege, as a clergyperson, to stand with all our families and honor the promise of abundant life "in season and out of season," as St. Paul puts it. (2 Timothy: 4) Some years, we get a facefull of darkness; we feel it. The darkness is real. So is the light. Count on it. The darkness cannot overcome it.

If you feel God's love and Christ's grace reflected in the love of family and friends seamlessly this season, rejoice in that bliss. If life is a bit more complex, or even very hard for you this year, I invite you to stay open to grace because grace is looking for you. God is always looking for us.

- Perhaps this Advent is a good season to keep a gratitude

journal, writing down one very specific gratitude in your life each day of Advent, claiming a different gratitude every day until Christmas arrives.

- Perhaps you can be the light for someone else, giving to charity, bringing a meal to a shut-in, or buying a gift for a child who might not get one without your generosity. Being the light for someone else can help us experience God's abundance again.
- Perhaps you are called to wait, open-handedly, in the real difficulties of your life, trusting that God sees your hard work, your faithfulness, your struggles amid tough times. God's love is sure and certain, even when we do not feel it, even when we don't know if we will get the outcome we want. As the brilliant psychologist Carl Jung put it, "Bidden or not bidden, God is present."

However you are feeling, and whatever you are carrying, join us at St. Andrew's on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day so together we can celebrate the arrival of the love, the grace, the mystery, and the majesty of Emmanuel, "God with us."



Photo: Katharine Clark



The Light That Makes the Ordinary Shine



The Rev. Dr. Sarah Robbins-Cole

LATELY, I'VE HAD A SONG on repeat—*Ordinary*, by Alex Warren. It's one of those songs that stops you in your tracks the first time you hear it, not because it's flashy or loud, but because there's something radiant about it. The other day I texted my daughter, who lives in London, to tell her she had to listen to it. This is the literal text conversation:

Me: "I am obsessed with the concert version of *Ordinary*, have you heard it?"

Elizabeth: "omg, haha."

Elizabeth: "You have no idea how obsessed I am with that song, hahaha."

Elizabeth: "Did you see the video? You must see the video!"

This isn't the first time this has happened with music. It happens often enough that we joke about

our "telepathic" music connection.

That small exchange—the "omg" and the "hahaha", the shared listening, the recognition—felt like light to me. A reminder that love connects us in ways that defy logic, and that beauty can break into even the most ordinary day.

What I love about *Ordinary* is how it takes that same truth and turns it into song. Written for Warren's wife, the song is about how love transforms everyday life into something sacred. He sings about how his love for her makes even the simplest moments feel extraordinary—how an ordinary life, seen through the eyes of love, becomes holy ground. "You got me kissin' the ground of your sanctuary," he sings, as if standing barefoot in a church. His love becomes reverence. And in one of my favorite lines, he imagines the angels themselves as "jealous," because even in heaven they missed out on something so divinely human.

Warren's lyrics sound almost liturgical, words that could belong in a hymn or prayer. There's a good reason for that. The most profound loves in our lives—the ones that make us kinder, braver, more open-hearted—often bring us closest to God. They awaken us to the sacred in the simple: the sound of the dogs' paws tapping through the hallway until they find us, the

mug of tea left steaming by someone who thought we might need a cup, the song shared between mother and daughter. Even these quiet mercies—those small, often unnoticed gifts of grace—shine with the light of love.

That is what the Gospel of John means when it says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." The Light of Christ doesn't always arrive with trumpets or revelation. More often, it flickers into being through moments that look almost ordinary—through music, through kindness, through a love so real it changes how we see the world.

The Incarnation itself—God choosing to become human, to live an ordinary life—is the ultimate reminder that nothing is truly ordinary once it has been touched by love. The kitchen table covered in breakfast dishes, the sofa with its rumpled pillows that no one—not even the grown children—can quite straighten, even these small, exasperatingly ordinary things can glow with divine light.

Listen to *Ordinary* when the world feels dim, and you will hear what I hear—not just a love song, but a testimony to the truth that light still shines in the darkness, and that the most ordinary things, through love, become radiant.

Parishioner Reflections

The Promise of Christmas

IT WAS INTO A WORLD MARKED by fear, oppression, and uncertainties that the birth of Christ brought peace, compassion, and light to a world of darkness over 2,000 years ago. Yet, in our contemporary society, we do not need to look far afield to be struck by injustices, cruelty, and doubt. Our contributing authors remind us how even the smallest light can

illuminate the darkness. At St. Andrew's, we see the light of the world reflected in many ways: in warmth of community, in music that lifts us, in service to others, and in life-long learning that sustains us. This Advent, may we be reminded of the promise of the Christmas season in the knowledge that "the light still shines."

Symbolism of Light in the Darkness



David Guydan

WHY IS IT that we celebrate the birth of Jesus in the darkest month of the year? I have come to realize that the date, December 25, came about for reasons that span his-

torical, cultural, and theological reasons.

For many years, friends of ours invited Elizabeth and me to a celebration of the winter solstice with a black tie gala held at a boathouse on the Charles River. A decidedly pagan event—the evening included food, drink, and dancing—culminating with the blowing of a ram's horn at midnight. We all joined in a chant to provide spiritual fuel to the sun god so that the sun might start its solar journey northward again for longer days and increased light.

In our Christian tradition, we celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25, just at the point where the days begin to grow longer—a powerful metaphor that expresses

hope and renewal in the darkest days of the year. The first generations of Christians did not acknowledge Jesus' birth at all. By the 4th century, though, early Christians celebrated Jesus' birth, conveniently, to coincide with ancient Roman festivals around the time of the winter solstice. Instead of honoring the sun, Christians celebrated the Son of God, eternal light.

Today, our tradition continues as we travel through Advent and the Christmas season. The birth of Jesus reminds us that hope springs from the darkness and, even in the darkest of times, new life—new light—is born. Let us each do our part to ensure that God's love shines brightest when the world seems darkest.



Photo: Peter B. Lull

At What Age Do We Need Christ's Light?



Laurin Baldwin

MANY OF US were baptized as children, so young we may not even remember the moment we were welcomed into the Christian family. On that day, our parents, guardians, and godparents promised to guide us toward the light of Christ. But

as we grow older, the question becomes: When do we personally recognize our need for that light? When do we decide for ourselves, "I want Christ in my life"?

Today, many children receive cell phones first as a way to connect with others. As time passes, however, the phones' light becomes just as important helping us read in dim spaces, see a menu more clearly, or even find our way in the dark. In the same way, as we mature, our need for light deepens. We begin to see that beyond practical light, we need spiritual light—Christ's light—to guide our hearts, minds, and souls. A baby relies on others to bring light; a follower of Christ chooses to live in it.

Where are you on that journey? When did you realize your own need for Christ's light? For

me, that awareness came gradually. My family moved every seven years, each move bringing upheaval—new schools, new friends, new routines. With my father serving as an Episcopal priest, each transition also meant a new church community. I remember especially the moves at age two, in third grade, and again in tenth grade. Each time, I felt disoriented and unsettled. And yet, with every change, I became more certain that Christ's light was the one constant—steady, real, and home.

This Christmas season, I hope your days are filled with light, love, and laughter. May the light of Christ guide us not only to see more clearly, but also to love more deeply—both ourselves and one another.

Remembering Friendship and the Light that Finds Us



JoLynn Heuer

BEING ASKED TO FIND the light through the darkness these days can feel more strained than it used to—for obvious and not so obvious reasons. I recently lost my best friend from childhood, Mary Kate. It was completely out of the blue, and although we

hadn't spoken in years—for what now seem like petty reasons—I always kept up with her through mutual friends and, funny enough, through my husband's parents, who are her godparents.

Going through old photos—laughing at the ridiculous '80s hairstyles and questionable fashion choices—I remembered one of our many adventures growing up in Inwood, a rare Manhattan neighborhood that felt more like a small town than part of a big city. One Christmas, when we were about 12, Mary Kate's dad, Ken, rallied the Church of the Good Shepard folk mass choir, his family, and me (his unofficial third daughter) for an evening of Christmas neighborhood caroling.

This was not exactly our first choice on a freezing winter night.

I remember the sighs as we pulled our hats down, hoping to hide from the preteen embarrassment sure to come if any of our friends saw us. But Ken didn't know the meaning of embarrassment, and I couldn't leave my best friend to face it alone, so I went caroling.

As we sang through the dimly lit streets, a few apartment lights flicked on, and neighbors peeked out. To our surprise, it wasn't to curse us for interrupting their TV show, or to demand that we quiet down. Instead, some brought family members to the window, others joined in, and a few even applauded. It was strange, a little funny, and completely unexpected—a true New York City moment, and one of the countless reminders that light has a way of finding us.

Holy Spirit Moments



James Kenary

MY WIFE AND I have three young children, and our house is usually some combination of laughter, big feelings, fun, and chaos. When the day is over and the kids are in bed, there are two moments that capture “The light shines in the darkness” for me—one through my children’s eyes, and one through mine.

First, the kids. Light and darkness are an intuitive part of how we see the world from a very early age, and we have the nightlights/

bedside reading lamps/youth flashlights in our home to prove it. Our kids lobby each evening for the light to stay on as long as possible; they naturally wish to push off darkness. I believe that Jesus spoke in terms of light and darkness because this ingrained desire for light is in all of us from the earliest of ages. As I am writing this, the sun is setting earlier each evening, and I certainly share their desire to leave the light on later!

For my wife and me, the light shining in the darkness happens each night when we quietly check on the kids before we go to bed. I have never seen anything more peaceful than the face of a sleeping child. Seeing the sleeping faces of our children is a moment of profound clarity, a reminder to me that the main story in the plotline of each day is not whatever is happening in the outer world, but that God created us, knows us, and loves us. A good friend of mine often speaks of “Holy Spirit moments,” described as subtle

gifts of God’s love that will appear in everyday life to sustain us. The sleeping face of a child in a dark room is one of these Holy Spirit moments for me; the light shining in the darkness.

As a family, we also share moments of that same light together at St. Andrew’s. We moved to town and began attending just over a year ago, and the number of examples is already long in such a short time: the joy of the children’s programs, the wonder of the Christmas pageant, the beauty of the choir’s music each week, the dedication of the clergy, and the kindness of this community. St. Andrew’s is a light shining in the darkness every week. This is especially true during the Christmas season. I am learning that Holy Spirit moments are often spontaneous surprises, but they can also be cultivated. St. Andrew’s does this faithfully for my family. We are very grateful.



Photo: Peter B. Lull

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