

Back to the START
Epiphany & Communion Sunday
John 1:1-18 & Jeremiah 31:7-14
By: Rev. Patrick D. Cherry

As we consider the opening of John's Gospel and the New Year, we ponder the importance of beginnings. Beginnings set the tone. What is so important of this beginning on the heels of Christmas?

~The Dimming of The Light~

We have officially entered the time of the "Christmas Hangover". Do you know what I'm talking about? We are exhausted from all the preparations and the festivities. The family has returned from whence they came. The gifts have been unwrapped and the wrapping paper tossed in the trash. The laundry has piled up with bath towels and guest bed sheets. The decorations are being put away. The tree tossed to the curb or packed away in its box.

The most depressing portion for me is the annual dimming of the lights. The neighborhoods once bright with lights and color begin to dim to ordinary, unimpressive dwellings. Even the New Year's Ball in Time Square that dazzled us with bright lights to ring in the New Year is now dim and packed away.

The darkness of the long winter nights seems to take over. The bright light of Christmas has come and past and now we must wait in the darkness another year!

~A Light That Still Shines~

Culture and commerce have moved on. But often we too forget and move on. We forget that those Wise Persons, the Magi, were late to the party. They were not present that faithful night as our Christmas Eve services might lead us to believe. The natal star, the light that guided their way, did not cease to shine upon Jesus' birth. It continued to serve as a beacon to the faithful, guiding them to their future hope.

Earlier we read the beginning of John's Gospel. The writer is quick to remind us, from the very beginning that there has always been a Light in the darkness. The occasion of Christ's birth did not begin something entirely new...No, the birth of Jesus merely takes us back to the start.

In true poetic form John's Gospel sets the stage for this event and places it within a much larger story. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" In but a few short phrases, very large theological themes are presented, that of the origin, the relationship, and the identity of this child given the name Jesus. "*In the beginning...*" declares that He existed long before the shepherds gathered...long before the cries of a newborn rocked the stable...long before a young woman conceived through extraordinary circumstances...frankly, long before the earth was formed and God called light out of the darkness, Christ was there.

"*...and {THIS} Word was with God...*" Not only was Christ there, Christ was there with God. Before the foundations of the world as we know it took shape, Christ had a relationship with the Creator.

“...and the Word was God.” Not to be confused, before we even make it out of verse one of chapter one, the writer asserts that this very Word was not only there in the beginning with God, but was and is God. The identity of this Word is not mistaken. This Word is God incarnate. This Word is Jesus!

~Back to the Start~

With our New Year’s resolutions in mind we have launched into a new year. 2015 promises to bring with it new challenges, new triumphs, and new opportunities. We are excited to embark upon new adventures and experience God’s leading in powerful ways.

We leave in our wake 2014 with its joys & sorrows, pain & healing, and hardships & victories. We now have a fresh beginning, back at the start of a new year. But let’s not be deceived about the purpose of this new start. Let us not jump too quickly into our plans for New Year’s prosperity and plans for improvement. The hope of a good year is not found in our resolutions... or our new gym memberships and workout plans... or the gifts still fresh from their wrappings. No, our Hope is far greater and far brighter!

Before we take another step, let us first gaze upon that Star that led those wise individuals, so long ago, to the bedside of a savior...the Savior! Stars have been used for centuries to guide and orient travelers on their way.

Friends, every journey needs its proper beginning...and there is no better start than orienting to this star. Sure the journey ahead takes us deeper into the unknown. But let echo in your mind the promises of God, “*In the darkness there has shown a great light.*” This light is the light of the world. It was at the very start with God, for this Light is God. This light took on human flesh to dwell among us offering forgiveness and a new start.

Christ was born for a purpose and is prepared for such a time as this. His purpose was and is to save this world and lead it back to where it started...in the peaceful presence of God.

So let us head into this New Year with the assurance of His love, with the promises of His grace, and the sharing of His power. Let us venture into this New Year together with a Holy Purpose. For God has wonders awaiting us if we but follow the star back to the start!