

This Little Light of Mine

Laurie Haas



Luke 2:21-38

So here we are just one week after our Christmas celebration of the birth of the Messiah: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace and we're already bumping into a time when someone is accepting and even welcoming death! My goodness, we haven't even taken our tree down yet, the Christmas clock is still playing Christmas carols on the hour and we are already thrust into a cold dark world of death and swords piercing souls.

What happened to all is calm, all is bright? Can't we camp out in the glow of the starry night with Christmas angels, a few more hallelujahs and some cattle lowing? Just a few verses earlier, on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day, we read in Luke how the shepherds told Mary and Joseph what the Lord had made known to them through the angels, "Do not be afraid, for I am bringing your good news of great joy for all the people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Mary was just treasuring all of these words and pondering them in her heart when Simeon gives her some new words to chew on: This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel. This child will be a sign that will be opposed—oh and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Our Silent, Holy night is shattered. The manger has suddenly become cruciform.

Mary and Joseph are in the Temple with Jesus, because according to Jewish Law, a new mother must be purified and the first-born son must be presented. Luke sort of meshes these two events together and it's how the young family meets Simeon and Anna.

Simeon and Anna are two faithful servants who have been hanging out in the Temple day and night waiting for the intrusion of a faithful God. Simeon is filled with the Holy Spirit and it has been revealed to him, that he will not die, until he had seen the Messiah. He not only sees the Messiah, he holds God's promise in his old, weathered hands.

Anna has been worshiping and praying in the Temple nearly her whole life. At seeing the Christ child, the arrival of "peace on earth," she is overflowing with praise and thanksgiving.

These two old birds become the Poster children for each one of us--young and old to show us a faithful response to Christmas and the Christ Child. They model the posture we are to take as we step out of the picture perfect Christmas card of the silent, holy night and right into the noise and cruelty of the world.

As we look back on 2016—which likely is a foreshadow of 2017-- we are assaulted by the violence and the destruction and the loss. We may be tempted to hide away in our homes, to lock the doors, curl up in bed and pull the covers over our head. We remember the terrorist attacks in Brussels, Nice, Istanbul, Berlin & Munich. We remember the Pulse Nightclub Massacre, the Police Shootings of Alton and Philando and the slaughter of Dallas Police Officers. We remember the earthquakes in Ecuador and Italy, the flooding in Louisiana and of course Hurricane Matthew that pummeled Haiti and even took 49 lives in the southeastern United States. We remember Aleppo and Mosul. We remember the Zika virus, fires raging out of control and planes crashing with Brazilian soccer players. And who can forget two-year old Lane Graves who was attacked and killed by an Alligator at Disney, right in front of his father?

These horrific headlines of 2016 that sadden our hearts and bring fear to our souls, don't even take into account our own personal experiences of death, loss and heartache...you know the personal traumas that

“A light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not and cannot overcome it.”

bore a hole in your heart so deep that you're not sure if you can continue to breathe.

Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Manger & Cross.

As we step into 2017, for the world at large and for our small very personal world: remember the response from Anna who saw the Christ child and from Simeon who held the Prince of Peace in his hands.

Simeon rightly predicts that the coming of salvation is also the advent of conflict. Yet his response is peace. He now has the courage to live and to die in peace, because he knows that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has overcome the world. Anna's response? Praise and thanksgiving. She sees the Christ child and immediately begins to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for redemption. The lights they shine to help dispel the darkness are peace and praise.

Just looking at the top stories from 2016 illustrates how desperately we need Anna and Simeon as we venture into the New Year. We need them to help us utter the praise of God that both responds to God's presence and resists the presence of evil. We need them to model the reaction to this convergence of waiting and fulfillment. The kingdom is here, but not yet fully here. We need them to give us the courage to trust in our God who is indeed present and powerful when the world in which we live suggests otherwise. We need them, so we can have the courage to shine

our little lights into all of the dark places.

Jesus said, "I am the Light of the word." And he also said, "You are the light of the world."

I was intrigued by the title of a book I read last year called, "All the Light We Cannot See." It is about a blind girl and an orphaned boy set in World War Two. It has a fair amount of disturbing images, but the title reminds us that there is goodness and kindness going on that we are not aware of...perhaps small acts, but often with far-reaching ripple effects. We read the headlines and we are immersed in the big stories of sadness and destruction, but there are also stories of light we need to look for and listen for from those around us. And some of these stories need to have us in the leading role.

In medieval times, there was a charming legend about light and how on Christmas Eve the Christ Child wandered throughout the world looking for places where he would be welcomed. The esteemed Dr. McConnell did a version of this story with five of our teenagers in the Family Christmas Eve Service. Dr. McConnell was wearing a Santa hat with Mickey Mouse ears and flashing lights...a sight to behold. This story is slightly different, as the Christians are actively seeking the Christ Child in whatever form He might take.

It goes like this. Those who loved Christ--hoping he would find their homes--placed lighted candles in the window to invite him in. No one knew what he would look like when he came. He might be a beggar or blind or a poor and lonely child. So devout Christians

welcomed all into their homes who knocked on their door on Christmas Day. To turn anyone away may have meant rejecting the Christ Child.

I wonder what it would be like, if we were to shine a light of welcome from our window? Or to carry a light of love with us into our grocery stores and neighborhoods.

I learned something about light when I was running in the early morning darkness. As my eyes adjusted, I could make out the contours of the path fairly well. Another runner who had actually thought ahead by bringing a flashlight was running towards me. The runner shined their light straight ahead, so it came right at me. This light actually blinded me and I had to stop until they passed by, because I couldn't even see the path. Just a bit later, another runner came up from behind, also carrying a flashlight. As she came alongside of me, shining her light, something remarkable happened. We both could see so much better.

I think this simple running story demonstrates the power and effectiveness of coming alongside someone with our little light, if not walking directly in their shoes, then at least feeling their stride.

So where will you shine your little light this year?

Maybe your light will be like the teacher who started a Gentleman's club for boys of single-parent families. An elementary teacher in South Carolina named Raymond Nelson couldn't get his students to behave properly in his class. It was then that he came up with the idea of creating a "Gentleman's Club." Mr. Nelson bought jackets, vests, and ties for kids who didn't have their own and started to teach the boys life lessons. Each week they discussed a new topic like how to tie a tie, how to address their elders, and how to treat their sisters, mothers, and teachers.

A strict dress code introduced by Nelson serves as the tool in nurturing the moral consciousness of

the students because a man wearing a tuxedo won't behave like a bully. Mr. Nelson said, "I know a lot of them struggle because a lot of them don't have men at home, so I just want them to grow up and think of the things that I teach them." Mr. Nelson is shining a light in the dark world of young boys without a male role model to guide and love them.

Sometimes shining a light may mean bending the rules...just a bit. When a wildfire in Canada had cut off Fort McMurray from the rest of the world, a mass evacuation began. Tens of thousands of people had to leave the city on airplanes as soon as possible. But what about their pets?

As a rule, passengers carrying animals must provide all kinds of necessary documents, and the pets themselves are supposed to be in special cages in the plane's cargo hold. But fortunately, the people managing the airline came alongside of the people who were fleeing their homes and imagined the trauma of leaving behind one's beloved pet. And the airline broke their own rules, allowing the displaced pets to fly in the main cabins along with their owners. Every human and every furry family member was saved! A flicker of light.

Sometimes shining our light is simply opening our eyes to those around us and offering what we have. Anne Glancey, a retired schoolteacher, received a letter from city officials saying that she could be fined \$3,000 per day if she didn't make repairs to her home. The old lady had no one to help her. Then one day, Anne saw some young people working on her house! These kind workers turned out to be her neighbors, Adam and Kristin. The young couple didn't have a lot of money, but they chose to use their time in a meaningful way. They spent the whole summer fixing and painting Anne's house, so she could continue to live in it...another light.

Maybe your light will be in a smile, a hug, a listening ear, or a kind word. You see we can't run away and

hide from the darkness. Friends with a posture of peace and praise, we are called from the God of the manger and the cross to light up the lives of others with love and joy and decency.

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