

“The Brightest Light of Christmas”
Luke 2:1-20

While his little dog Max balances a sleighful of bags stuffed to the brim on the precipice of Mt. Crumpet, there stands the Grinch. Those sacks are filled with every bit of the Christmas presents, goodies, and decorations from the townsfolk below.

“Poo poo to the whos,' he was grinchly humming.
'They're finding out now that no Christmas is coming.
They're just waking up... I know just what they'll do.
Their mouths will hang open a minute or two.
Then the Whos down in Whoville will all cry: BOO HOO.'
'That's a noise,' grinned the Grinch, 'that I simply must hear.'
He paused, and the Grinch put a hand to his ear.
And he did hear a sound rising over the snow.
It started in low, then it started to grow.”
(*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, by Dr. Seuss)

You can picture this in your mind's eye. The scene moves from the Grinch's eager green face over to a brightening center in the town where the Whos have all gathered in a circle, bells ringing and voices lifted in joyous song, a bright light glowing among them.

“Welcome Christmas, come this way...,” they sing.
“Christmas day is in our grasp, so long as we have hands to clasp.”

And then the scene shifts back to the Grinch:
“But this... this sound, wasn't sad. Why this sound sounded... glad
(Merry. Very.)!?”
Every Who down in Whoville the tall and the small
was singing without any presents at all.
He hadn't stopped Christmas from coming. It came!
Somehow or other, it came JUST the same.
And the Grinch with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow
stood puzzling and puzzling, 'How could it be so?!
It came without ribbons. It came without tags.
It came without packages, boxes, or bags.'
He puzzled and puzzled 'til his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought something he hadn't before.
Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store.
Maybe Christmas – perhaps – means a little bit more.”

How the Grinch Stole Christmas, by Dr. Seuss is certainly a favorite Christmas book or movie for many of us. The tale of the Grinch whose heart grew three sizes because of the understanding that Christmas is about something more than presents, boxes, and bags makes for more than just a cute story—it captures the deeper meaning of Christmas just as we celebrate, by gathering here in worship, something deeper than holiday lights and mistletoe.

While the Whos are in the town square singing, the glow that surrounds them intensifies into a bright light—a star of sorts—that rises from their circle above the town, growing in size, illuminating the town, the sky, and even the Grinch himself. That light that rises up as the Whos are all singing *is* that something more. That is the light that represents the truth of Christmas.

We have reflected on light throughout Advent—the light of the candles each week... hope, peace, joy, love. And tonight we lit the Christ-candle, reflecting on the light who is Jesus Christ. “Come,” we have said together, “let us walk in the light of the Lord.” The invitation is to walk in the light of hope, peace, joy, and love. In other words, “Come, let our lives reflect the light of Christ as we live in his love and share that love with others.”

And tonight our Scripture passages reflect two more scenes of light. The first is the light of the glory of the Lord shining on the shepherds when an angel stands among them, declaring the birth of a Savior. And the second is the light of the stable, where Jesus is born.

Reminders of light on Christmas eve are indeed all around us. Soon, we will do something many of your treasure as the most important moment of Christmas when we light our own individual candles, sharing the light of Christ with one another and singing Silent Night.

Christmas eve is a peaceful, joyous time... at least, as we are gathered here in this sanctuary, singing and smiling, cozied together in this safe haven. It is easy here in this place to think about light and to reflect on the joys of Christmas.

But the brightest light of Christmas is not here in this cozy sanctuary on this peaceful night. It is not the candle you will light. It is not the light of the Advent wreath. It is not the star of light that rises above a circle of carolers. It is not even the light that glows off the manger.

The brightest light of Christmas is the light that we carry with us and spread to those around us when we're back to work or when the school break is over or with our families. The brightest light of Christmas is the light of God's love, and the ways we share that love each day of the year.

This light is the knowledge that God loves us so completely and fully that God could not bear to be distanced from us—to have any separation from us. And so God came to be one with us as a baby. And not a baby born into privilege; not in a glowing, lovely spot; but in on a dirty floor in a grungy barn in the middle of a government-required census for the purposes of raising taxes.

God's love is the brightest light we can share. God wants you to experience the peace, joy, and hope of Christmas—not only tonight but every day of your life. That is the best light of Christmas—the knowledge of God's love and the hope that that knowledge helps us love others. If God loves us so completely and fully, forgiving us and sacrificing for us—can we not then love, forgive, and sacrifice for others?

Tonight you will pass the light from your candle on to the person next to you. And soon the sanctuary will glow with the light of all of our candles burning together. May that light stay with you so that in the coming days you can pass the light of Christ—the light of hope and love and joy and peace—on to the next person by your actions. This is the light of Christmas. Not one evening of loving kindness here in this sanctuary, but a lifetime of loving kindness in action. Not this one evening of having hope, but a lifetime of hope in the knowledge that we are loved and that God who loves us is working all things together for good. Not just one evening of peace, but a lifetime of peace. Thanks be to God for love and hope, peace and joy. Thanks be to God for the light of Christ that we all carry with us and can share with those around us, not only tonight but each and every day. Amen.