

An Advent meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Advent III, December 11, 2011, dedicated to our newest members, Bill, Ron, Janice, Michael, Kim, Dylan and Cassidy, and always to the glory of God!

“The Light of the World Was Invited In”

**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11;
John 1:6-8, 19-28**

+++++

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth the meditations of each one of your hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

+++++

Kepler-22B appeared in the news this week. Kepler-22B is the newly-discovered planet, which is 600 light years away, and sits right in the middle of a zone astronomers refer to as the “Goldilocks Zone.” The Goldilocks Zone is that hard to find place that is not too hot and not too cold where water, which is essential for life, does not boil or freeze (*The Columbus Dispatch*, Tuesday, December 6, 2011, A-9). Kepler-22B is blue and beautiful and looking at photos makes one believe this could have been Earth at some point. I wonder if life on Kepler -22B is looking at Earth thinking the same thing.

Scientists say Kepler-22B has a shopping mall-like surface temperature of 72 degrees Fahrenheit. It circles a sun-like star in the Goldilocks Zone and is the first planet we have

found that could be habitable for life, as we know it. The planet has a yearly cycle of 290 days and seems to have rock and water. However, scientists report, because Kepler-22B is so large - 2.4 times the size of Earth - the surface is a bit too big for life to exist on the surface (Ibid). Along with the fact that it 22 million years away, none of us should book a flight there anytime soon.

As I sat reading about Kepler-22B, I couldn't help but think about the "Light of **Our** World" whose birth, life and very existence we are once again anticipating in our ancient scriptures and in our very lives this week. Although John's Gospel lessons focuses on John the Baptist's arrival proclaiming the coming of "The Light," I cannot help but wonder about the designs and choices God has made to give us this "Light."

I have many questions about "the Light" and our relationship to it.

How was it that our God, who created Kepler-22B and Earth, all the stars, the swirling clouds of hydrogen gas that tie together solar systems, planets and galaxies, our God who imagined, created and breathed design, and all the colors of light and life into everything else in all the universe and called it GOOD - how is it that our God would see to it to bring all of these intricate patterns of the universe into one bundle of human life and "Light" and place this bundle into the womb of a woman, and call HER beloved and call HIM wonderful, counselor, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace? How could this be? How could we be so blessed to receive such a Light in our lives?

Moreover, how could we ever miss this blessing? How could we turn away and laugh it off or shrug it off? How could we, whom God also created in God's image, ignore it or pretend this Light never existed or never came? How could we, a "sky full of children," God's stars in this infinite universe whom God has also created to adore this Light, how could we

MISS the dance, the song, the breath, the delightful smile, the healing word, the hopeful presence? How could we MISS the peace he brings? How could we not see and respond to the LOVE in the womb of a young woman from Nazareth in whom the universe took form and for whom the ancient stars found new light, and the ancient harmonies of sound found new voice and the angels of glory clapped their hands with joy? How could anyone on this planet miss this when we can find a blue and beautiful sister planet spinning 600 light years or 22 million calendar years away?

John came as a witness to testify to the Light. He was not concerned about his own agenda, although clearly John knew what he believed was right and wrong. John was really concerned that people would see the Light of God coming into this world. Like a neon arrow pointing, "HERE! THIS ONE!" John stood in the darkness of his time pointing to the Light.

John wanted everyone who had been created in the image of God, (that means each human throughout human history), if you will, "every star in the sky full of children," to see that God's goodness had been fulfilled right in front of their eyes. John was very clear that he himself was neither the Messiah nor the ever elusive prophet Elijah, John was not even worthy to tie the sandal of "the Light."

Even though John arrived like thunder in the desert, it was Jesus who would later open the book of the prophet Isaiah and read with truth and authority, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" It was Jesus who was the promise given to all the nations. It was Jesus who would fulfill Isaiah's prophecy - to build up from the ancient ruins, to repair the former devastations, to repairs the ruined cities.

It IS Jesus that we need more than ever before on this planet in which darkness too often blows away the light in our

times.

From the vast and distant beauty of Kepler-22B to the cry for justice on North Garfield Avenue 15 blocks from our church, God has been trying to get our attention this week. On Wednesday afternoon, shots rang out. Sadly, gunshots ring out all the time in Columbus and many hamlets and cities in America. But on Wednesday, shots rang out and a coloring book hit the floor. Five-year-old Micenzia Holloway, one of God's stars in the sky full of God's children, had been grazed by a bullet while sitting at her living room table drawing in one of the big coloring books she loves. Fortunately, this beautiful bright-eyed 5-year-old artist and neighbor of ours is okay. She was back in school the next day. On Wednesday evening, as darkness had descended on N. Garfield Avenue, Micenzia's grandmother said, "Home is supposed to be a place where you can lock the world out. ***But, the world came in uninvited.***" (*The Columbus Dispatch*,_ Friday, December 9, 2011, Page B-1)

The world came in uninvited. One of God's children randomly fired a gun at the house and struck another one of God's children through the walls of that house. Each person was created in the image of God. Each one is a star in the sky full of God's children. One chose to blow the light of the other out of the universe. That is really what happens when violence overcomes the Light of God in this world. Like a candle in the wind, the light is blown out.

I could not help but wonder about this. We have artists all around us. At CCAD, the Columbus Museum of Art, in our church, in our homes, they sit down in peace each day to draw, to paint, to create. They need light to create. They need visions of what is possible, what is good, what is promised to bring hope into this world. What if we collected all the guns in our city and piled them in one place and destroyed them and gave all the gun owners a box of crayons and a coloring book or canvasses and palettes of paints? What if the only sounds we heard on late afternoons in Columbus as December descends in darkness were the sounds of music surrounding

the sounds of laughter and joy surrounding the sounds of crayons and paint brushes and pencils on paper? *The light of God would come invited into such a place as this.*

John came to testify to the Light. If we are to make peace and find peace in this world and in the universe, which God has created, each one of us will need to invite the Light of the World into our lives.

Jesus Christ, “the Light of the World,” came to us as Jesus of Nazareth, wholly human and wholly divine to show us what it means to be created in the image of God. Invite the Light of the World into your heart, to your life, to your home. It is as simple and as beautiful as that. Amen.

Copyright 2011, First Congregational Church, UCC