

*“The Super Light Coming Home  
for Christmas”*

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

Part III of VI in “Home for Christmas” Sermon Series

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From the Pulpit

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An Advent meditation delivered by the Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Advent III, December 13, 2020, dedicated the memory of Casey Goodson, Jr., a 23-yr. old African American gunned down by an officer of the law in Columbus on December 4, to the memory of Paul Santilli who passed to eternal life from COVID19 on Monday, December 7, to Susan Brooks, George and Windsor Ferzli (Yasmine, Nicholas, Luke), Brianna Harrell, Heather and Dameon Jones (Avery and Brynn), Mike and Wendy Kennedy and Rev. Bob Turner, our newest members who join today and always to the glory of God!

**“The Super Light Coming Home for Christmas”**

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

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Did you know that there are “Super-Earths” in the Universe? It’s true. In fact, “Super-Earths” may be some of the most common planets in our galaxy. Since 2009, the Kepler Space Telescope has

discovered about 4,000 exoplanets. 30% of them (or 1200) are called Super-Earths. And a few percent of those super-earths orbit within their host star's habitable zone.

A **Super-Earth** is an extrasolar planet with a mass higher than Earth's, but substantially lower than our Solar System's ice giants, Uranus and Neptune. In case you are unfamiliar with the term "Super-Earth," it refers only to the mass of the planet, and so does not imply anything about the surface conditions or habitability. In general, Super-Earths are defined by their masses, and the term does not imply temperatures, compositions, orbital properties, habitability, or environments.

Through the Kepler Space Telescope, scientists have been discovering Super-Earths for 28 years. It is clearer every day, that there really are planets and lifeforms like ours out there in the Universe. I am overjoyed to think that Ewoks are real. In a year in which our lives and our planet have been defined by a tiny Coronavirus with spherical particles whose surface has unique projections generally averaging only 120 nanometers in diameter, the 1200+ Super-Earths take us outside of ourselves and our Solar System into an ever-expanding Universe.

As I sat reading about Super-Earths and exploring the growing body of evidence for life far beyond our planet and solar system, 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 lesson focuses on John the Baptist's arrival proclaiming the coming of our "Super Light," I cannot help but

wonder about the designs and choices God has made to give us this “Super Light.”

I have many questions about “the Light” and our relationship to him. How was it that our God, who created the Universe, the Earth, all the stars, the swirling clouds of hydrogen gas that tie together the solar systems, planets and galaxies, that our God imagined, created and breathed design, and all the colors of light into this place that we call home. That our God did all of this 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 – and in whom God also placed the Light – ignore it or pretend this “Super 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 teenage girl 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 blue and beautiful sister planets spinning 600 light years or 22 million calendar years away?

**John came as a witness to testify to the Super Light.** He was not concerned about his own agenda, although clearly John knew who he was, knew what he believed, knew what 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! HERE HE IS!” 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, unroll the scroll of Haftorah 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 build up and repair the former devastations, to repairs the ruined cities back to life. It IS Jesus that we need now more than ever before on this planet in which darkness too often blows away the light in our times.

## Jesus is “the Super Light” of our lives and this universe.

From the vast and distant beauty of Super-Earths, I want to suggest something to you this week about Light and Love and Life. I believe the same light of God which came into being at the foundation of the Universe and found a place to shine from a feed trough in Bethlehem almost 2020 years ago, can be found shining in each and every one of us that God creates. I believe that our God who loves us so much that God would give us God’s **SUPER** light shine in the person of Jesus Christ, also shines on us, and in us and through us to others. I believe that each us is created in the image of God. Each one of us is a star in the sky full of God’s children.

If we truly see each other as stars in the universe of God’s creative design, why is it that through acts of violence, anger, aggression, and neglect one child of God chooses to blow out the light and another child of God who was created for love and life and light? Let me put it more simply – how is it a Deputy named Jason Meade could shoot a 23-year-old man names Casey Goodson, Jr. to death at 12:15 pm on December 4th in the Northland area of Columbus, Ohio?

One light of God blowing out another light of God in this universe we call home means one less star in the sky of our universe.

In the depths of my soul, I ache each day when I consider the injustice, the hatred and the anger running so deep in all too many people that they act out of the darkness within them and destroy the light of God in another human being. Like a candle in the wind, the light is blown out. It pains me deeply to consider such grievous actions against another. It happens all too often. We have to find a way to nurture God’s light inside of ourselves so that we lift up,

celebrate and protect the light of God inside others with whom we share this planet.

Here at First Church, we have artists all around us. At the Columbus College of Art and Design, the Columbus Museum of Art, in our church, in our homes, they sit down in peace each day to write, to draw, to paint, to create. They need light within and light outside of themselves to create. They need visions of what is possible, what is good, what is promised to bring hope into this world.

So, here is my vision for promise and possibility. 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 “Super Light” of God would come invited into such a place as this.

John came to testify to the Super Light. We, who are able to find super-earths spinning far outside our solar system, need to nurture and protect and support the light inside each one of us. If we are to make peace, find peace and be peace in this world and in the universe, which God has created, each one of us needs to invite the Super Light of the World into our lives.

Jesus Christ, “the Super 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 Super Light

of the World into your heart, to your life, and into your home this Christmas.

It is as simple and as beautiful as that. Amen.