

“A Flashlight in the Manger”

Luke 2:1-20

**The fifth in the Advent Series “Walking Together
in the Light of God”**

The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens
Senior Minister

7:30 PM

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From the Pulpit

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A Christmas Meditation delivered by Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Christmas Eve, 7:30 pm, December 24, 2022, dedicated to all our babies born in 2022, to all our children who returned to church this year, to the teens and parents of First Church who show-up all the time and constantly bring us a spirit of joy and mission and always to the glory of God!

“A Flashlight in the Manger”

Luke 2:1-20

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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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She had never heard her parents talk like this before, but for days, Sally kept hearing her mom and dad talk about Charlie coming to town. Apparently, Charlie was huge, filled with fury and wherever he went, he destroyed things. He was big enough to knock down trees, houses and schools. “When Charlie arrives,” her parents said, “we are all going to hide so he doesn’t destroy us.” Charlie was fierce and mean. Charlie was scary. It turns out, Charlie was a Hurricane. Sally didn’t know much about hurricanes, but she knew a lot about Charlie.

At night, Sally went to bed and asked God to stop Charlie, to make him go away and to make him nice. She would keep her flashlight

on in bed, hoping he wouldn't come at all. In spite of her prayers, Charlie came to town late one night. He was as bad as everyone said he would be – maybe worse. Although she was brave, Sally's flashlight had burned out and she faced Charlie in the darkness. Her parents kept telling her stories and singing her hymns and songs she loved. But, alone in the darkness, Sally prayed for the bright morning light to come. Finally, the sun rose on a new day. Charlie had passed by, and Sally saw the path of his destruction. He had taken so much from so many and no power meant nights of darkness. Sally never forgot the fright she felt in the darkest night of Charlie's devastation.

Remembering Charlie, Sally was determined to help others who were afraid of the dark. On Christmas Eve, Sally went to church determined to help a friend for Christmas. When she went into the sanctuary, she placed a lit flashlight in the manger right beside baby Jesus. She whispered, "Welcome to the world baby Jesus. Baby Jesus, Charlie scared me, but I won't let him scare you. This light will keep you safe tonight."

Like Sally, when children are asked what they want most in the middle of storms, in the midst of war, in the challenging nights of their lives, children say they want a flashlight to push back the darkness that closes in around them.

Tonight, in Zhovkva, Ukraine, Polish Dominican Sisters are lighting candles and flashlights for the children facing another night in the dark with no power and heat. As they sing "Silent Night," they all push back the darkness of war. All across Ukraine, people are lighting candles tonight to push back the darkness. And there is a flashlight in the manger to keep baby Jesus safe tonight.

Tonight, in South Sudan, children are caught in the crossfire of civil war. Doctors Without Borders are there offering them light in the darkness, medical care, fresh water and food. We pray that someone has placed a flashlight in the manger to welcome the newborn Jesus.

Tonight, in Columbus, Ohio, children and parents are gathered together in the YWCA Family Shelter and in warming centers across our city to receive a blessing, a gift, a meal, a kind word of love and will hear the Christmas story once again. And there is a flashlight in the manger to bring hope and welcome to Jesus.

In Sally, the sisters, the doctors, and the people in our shelters, we come to witness the Power of One. One person, one group, one volunteer, one friend can turn around a life in the darkest night. In the newborn Jesus, the Power of One holds each of our hearts and binds us together in love.

In the spirit of Jesus, of Sally, the Dominican Sisters in Ukraine, Doctors without Borders in South Sudan, volunteers and staff in the homeless family shelters and warming centers in our city tonight and all the children who gather everywhere, let us bring a flashlight to the manger so that baby Jesus comes in peace, feel protected and safe, and so he can find comfort in our joy – tonight.

Let us put a flashlight in the manger tonight as well. May we all feel the warmth and love of the newborn Christ tonight. May we make it through the night, to the bright morning hope of Christmas day. Amen.

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