



### Shining God's Light Through Our Lives

Isaiah 61:10-62:3 ; Psalm 147:13-21; Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7; John 1:1-18 || December 28, 2025 || St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA 02339 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

This morning we gather fresh from the ebullient celebrations of Christmas and the announcement of the arrival of baby Jesus, as told to the Shepherds and passed down to us. We are offered the spectacularly familiar, with beautiful and comforting, if not astounding and soaring words from the very beginning of John's gospel. This is John's version of the nativity, and it is lovely. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.... What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people".

Let's take a deep breath on this freezing morning and wonder together – ok, now what? What does it mean that God is here, among us? What does it mean, as we return or exchange gifts for what fits or is needed? What does it mean for our faith and for our understanding of the world IN THIS MOMENT that God was born in such humble circumstances and then grew up and practiced such transformative ministry that so upset the apple cart that the world's authorities turned against him?

Closer to home, what does it mean for us that Shepherds – those itinerant field workers confirmed Jesus' birth and then kept talking about it? What are we to take away from that?

Well, most immediately it means that we are invited to enjoy the beauty of this Christmas service, continue to enjoy the decorations and the on-going celebration – we Episcopalians are committed to celebrating all twelve days of Christmas! Even as you ponder in your hearts what this miraculous gift means to us.

This morning, our gathering focus is Shining God's Light Through our Lives, as we are offered scripture with Jesus' inbreaking into the world as the word – made flesh and light, which darkness can not overcome. We are invited to reflect on what this miraculously good news means in our own lives. We are not alone. God knows and loves us this and every minute – and we are going to consider what it looks like to shine this love and light upon others, in this community and beyond – sharing the light and love of Christ, being God's beacons of love and light through our actions and beliefs.

Consider the light of Christ as an internal lamp that can illuminate every corner and crevice – even the dusty corners we may shy away from. God's light can help scatter the fear or dissipate the power that the accumulated darkness might hold. ....

Shining God's light through our lives also refers to the examples we set – how well we embody God's love for the world – how our lives and choices are rooted in faith and can disentangle deeply rooted wrongs. If we could each live every day, hour or every breath as Jesus taught us, the joy that comes from shining God's light through the way we live and practice our faith would be contagious!

This morning, we are centering much of what follows as an opportunity to live out one of the central tenets of our faith, and that is to pray – to pray for individual needs and petitions and to pray and lift up any burdens that are created when people cannot possibly pray for themselves.

The Prayers of the People this morning have been written in heart ache, joy, in expectation and in desperation, and most beautifully they have been shared with this congregation, in response to the invitations that we have been extending to the world since November.

I have been praying these petitions since receiving them, and have given thanks for the brave and broken or bewildered souls who have requested them.

Among the gifts of praying for others is the promise that God is listening. If you want an up-close experience of Emmanuel, pray – God is right there listening. Prayer also connects us to one another and draws us closer to God. While the answer to our prayers may not be immediately evident, the lessening of the weight of them can be nearly instantaneous. The sheer act of praying, either silently or aloud, is apt to ease our burden almost immediately

because God helps shoulder them as we utter them. Together the worry or fear or weight of our petition is lighter, for having shared it. Similarly, our joy can be magnified when we are praying to give thanks for a divine gift, or simply for God's presence – our joy expands.

Importantly, the act of communal worship or sharing our prayers in community unites our voices and allows our voices to join the choir of angels. This year, we have blessed dozens of people and celebrated their ascendance to heaven and our prayers connect us to that gorgeous and expanding heavenly chorus.

So, all good things – yet, I appreciate that prayer may feel uncomfortable. Perhaps speaking prayers aloud, or praying at regular intervals is a potential spiritual growth edge for you? The first time I ever traveled to Africa, I was first uncomfortable, then delighted by the fact that the clergy we were visiting in Tanzania would not start their cars or vans until they prayed and gave thanks and asked for God's help with safe travels. That had not previously occurred to me as a prayer point. Practiced in the US, I will point out that it requires leaving a few minutes earlier because those prayers can be grounding AND time consuming.

Whether you are comfortable with daily prayer or not, this morning I encourage you to pray our community prayers will all your might. May each of us shine God's light through our lives as we express, read and ponder the prayers that have been offered and asked for in the community.

Each is different, with a different voice and life experience, and each is intended for our listening ear and loving hearts. May we be centered and grateful for God's presence as we lift them up in this sacred space for all the company of heaven to hear.

In the silence that follows, I hope that you will make some internal space for God's light to shine through your lives, through the lives of the petitioners and to the heart of God.

Amen+