

An IN PERSON Christmas: Let There Be Light

November 28, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you*" (John 20:21). Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Reflect on this Scripture: John 1:1-9 NRSV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

This Week: John 1:1-9

Given the world-making significance of "God with us" (the incarnation) for John, it is no wonder that he begins his Gospel with the words "in the beginning." As noted above, these words are intentionally evocative of the opening of Genesis 1. The writers of the creation story in Genesis 1 took Israel back to the time before the created order, to the moment before God spoke creation into existence, and John does the same thing with his readers. "In the beginning" there was God and the Word (Jesus), and the rest of the story unfolds from that relationship. John 1:3, like Genesis 1, views creation as belonging to God's Word. In the newly created order, life and light (v. 4) are the ways in which the Word, God's self-expression in Christ, is effective. John 1:1-4 evokes the wonder of creation, the gift of life, the power of the Word, and celebrates the mystery of revelation that transcends conventional limits of time and space.

The resilience of the light that shines in the darkness (v. 5) is confirmation of the power of life available in the Word.

John reads the story of creation and God's Word through the lens of the Jesus' incarnation, not simply OT traditions. However, the story of creation gives way quickly to another story. The cosmological imagery of vv. 1-5 is wedded to concrete historical experience through the person and witness of John the Baptist (vv. 6-8). The story of the Word, of God's self-expression, does not remain outside human experience but belongs to that experience. Moreover, the story of John the Baptist introduces faith and human response to the light into the story of the Word (v. 7).

-- Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol IX, p. 524-25

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. For John, the story of Jesus does not start in Bethlehem, but "in the beginning." How does this insight impact your understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ?
2. Why do you think it was so important for Jesus to be with us 'in person'?
3. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus is revealed as 'the light of the world.' How has Jesus been light for your world? In other words, how has Jesus illumined your life?
4. The Gospels also refer to fellow believers as "the light of the world." How have you been illumined by other members of the Christian family? How have you been light for others?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC and/or journal in the "*Morning by Morning*" gratitude resource.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: John 1:5 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*