

Sermon: Christmas I 2020  
St. Augustine's-in-the-Woods  
27 December 2020  
The Rev. Susan S. Gaumer

John 1:1-18  
Isaiah 61:10-62:3  
Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7  
Psalm 147

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

On the Sunday following Christmas each year we hear this magnificent Prologue from the

Gospel of John. “In the beginning” it starts, taking us right back to the Creation

story in Genesis in which God’s words become the light and life of the universe.

But now, in John’s Prologue, something new happens. A man appears, John the

Baptist, announcing that the “true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming

into the world” not John, but God’s holy Word now made flesh, incarnate, Jesus.

Jesus, God’s new light in the world to make God’s love known to us, to show us the

way to God’s heart.

Jesus who died for us, but death did not overcome him, nor, because of him, us.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

In this dark, winter season, long nights remind us how far north we are here on Whidbey. I had

forgotten how long they are, having lived in the south for over 40 years.

For most of 2020 we’ve also lived with the darkness imposed by COVID-19, the

pandemic that still separates families during these holidays, threatens us every

time we leave home, and yields tragic statistics of cases and deaths every day.

In Great Britain no one can go anywhere for fear of contracting the virus.

Here over 300,000 people who celebrated Christmas last year with their families are no

longer here. We’ve never endured a situation like this. When will it be over?

Where is the light at the end of this horrid tunnel?

Well, there is hope! The solstice, the coming of more sunlight, coincided with the arrival of the

first round of vaccines. This coincidence is wonderful news, of course.

Spring will come and so will some sort of conclusion to this pandemic.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

I find it comforting to remember that COVID-19 is not the world's first pandemic. In the fourteenth century the Black Plague caused a greater percentage of death than any in our times. Whole families, whole towns of people died terrible deaths. There was no cure. No vaccines were even imaginable for hundreds more years.

Yet even in that darkness the light of Christ's love broke through.

Julian of Norwich, possibly the first woman to be published in English, wrote of 16 encounters she had with Christ while in her thirties recovering from a serious illness.

"Showings" she called them and spent the rest of her life figuring out what they meant and writing about them in her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Julian gave her life to God, becoming an anchoress, a spiritual advisor literally attached to the Cathedral of St. Julian in Norwich, England, living in a small room with two windows—one looking out to the cathedral altar, the other out into the world.

Did she have the Plague? Did she lose loved ones in that pandemic? Did she take the name of the cathedral when she was shut into that little room for the rest of her life? We will likely never learn answers to these questions.

But we do know this: Julian knew the light of God's love in the darkness of her time and she shared it with others. Through her ministry and writing God's light shone. Her words, "That all will be well, all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" have given comfort to so many since she wrote them long ago.

Julian's final words from her *Revelation of Divine Love* are worth hearing on this day:

"Love was our Lord's meaning. He beholds his heavenly treasure with so great love on earth that He will give us more light and solace in heavenly joy, drawing us from the sorrow and darkness we are in. Thanks be to God." [Long Text, Chapter 86.]

"[God's] light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

May the light of Christ shine through you and me today. Merry Christmas!

