

I love the candle light portion of the Lessons and Carols and Christmas Eve services. Looking out over the congregation amidst the darkness of the night and the sanctuary, there appears a sea of light. The waves are the joined flickering of the individual candles, creating a movement amidst the stillness. Every so often you catch a glimpse of a face staring into the beauty of the flame before her and the hope or wonder that emanates, or you see another mouthing the words to *Silent Night* with eyes closed and depth of thought carried by the familiarity of the words. Regardless, it is a holy moment. Light and darkness. Hopes and fears. Dreams and horror. The wholeness of life. And, amidst it all, one wonders if the thing holding it all together and shot through it all is wonder.

There are any number of traditions and individuals who will try and align the stars for you so that all you have is light, hope, and dreams. However, we know that as sure as the days begin to lose a little daylight from June 21st onward, the world does not allow for one to reside solely in light, hope, and dreams. The darkness and fear and horror will find us. Yet, in the same way as our lives are not occupied by only the good, there is, we trust, a limit to those things that lay us low. Or, perhaps, there is something more. And as sure as the light begins to push out the daily darkness a little more each day after December 21st, we recognize the darkness has not, cannot, and will not overcome us.

Which is, in essence, the promise of the Gospel of John's prologue. Various versions exist. However, the one I prize is, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness *will not* overcome it." It is a strange thing to say for the 2000th time or so in the countless corners of our world from which it echoes. For it surely seems, at times, that the darkness is winning. We remembered the horror of Sandy Hook yesterday, and we seem to constantly confront heinous gun violence in ever increasing instances and carnage. Meanwhile, the myriad ways that violence permeates our lives, our relationships, our culture, and our world reminds us the shroud that surrounds us. Thus, it is not so much a certainty that we subscribe to but rather a declaration of faith. Amidst the darkness, we *trust* that the light shines and does and will drive out the darkness.

In a way, the candle lights of the Lessons and Carols and Christmas Eve services are an embodiment of this trust. Little lights--vulnerable and insignificant--joined together become a sea that flows on and washes out the darkness. Yes, it's a part of a worship service, but it hopefully also becomes an image that we can return to again and again, an icon of what God is up to and how God does it. For we trust that the light has come, yet we wait for the fullness or completeness of the darkness to be driven away. That does not happen in some transcendent esoteric way. Rather, it happens as the faces behind those candles see not only the beauty of that moment but also recognize their part in bringing the light back. For the light shines not only in the darkness, but the light shines within each of us. So, as Jesus says in Matthew, "let your light

shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify God in heaven.” Let your light shine. Yes, let your light shine and let our lights shine and let the whole world’s lights shine so that the darkness will not overcome. And as you stare into the beauty of the candle flame this seasons or close your eyes to consider more fully the depth of your being, may you see the light, recognize your light, trust in the light, and may you experience what holds it together and is shot through it all: Wonder.