

The First Sunday after Christmas Day, December 26, 2021
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Light is a funny thing.

Have you ever stepped outside after weeks of endless gray cloud cover and cold, damp air that with each passing day, seemed to burrow deeper and deeper right into your bones? And, after stepping outside, discovered that overnight all that damp and all those clouds had seemingly been burned away by bright, brilliant sunshine?

Even when the air is still brisk with sub-zero temperatures, turning your face upward toward for a brief moment of glowing warmth from our planet's nearest star is as nourishing as a cool drink of water when your throat is hot and parched.

A couple years ago, I had a conversation with my friend Bob, a physicist, and he told me about the properties and effects of light. We were talking about how light, well, enlightens. Allows us to see all that is around us. But while we know it's there, we can't actually see it.

For most of us, Bob told me, light is the thing that lets us see. Of course, he said this in his scientist voice: "Because our predominant form of sensory input involves light, we tend to have a hard time imagining how we might isolate it." In other words, you can't exactly get your hands around light.

From Isaac Newton to Albert Einstein, most major ideas to come out of the field of physics for the last 200+ years have been the result of the process of figuring out what light is and the rules it follows.

A quick physics lesson by a very much non-physicist: Light is mysterious. Sound exists as waves, while something like dirt, or this railing here, exist as particles. We tend to think of particles and waves as distinct things. But this is not so with light. "It exhibits properties we think of as contradictory." Bob told me. "There are ways in which it is discrete, and ways in which it is wavy, and that's just how it is."

Now, it is neither good science nor good theology to use science to prove or disprove ideas having to do with religious belief. But that doesn't mean that the two fields can't shed some light on each other.

In our conversation, Bob pointed out that for him, a scientist, at the heart of the study of light is mysterious phenomena that requires the scientist to let go of everyday intuition.

In Bob's words: "It's about letting go of ideas we are so attached to that we can't even see it, and honestly asking ourselves 'What is Nature trying to tell us about how it works?' Eventually you drop this cherished or comfortable idea that you've allowed to constrain your thinking, and suddenly everything makes sense."

The mysterious and even contradictory properties of light aren't just relegated to the scientific field.

Light, as the Evangelist John attests, is one of the most powerful metaphors that allows the human mind, heart, and spirit to contemplate and experience God. "The light is coming," John the Baptist tells anyone with ears to listen. "Forget what you think you know."

Forget what you think you know about God, for the birth of Jesus is the arrival of the divine in the flesh and blood and bone of a tiny child in a stable filled with barn animals.

Forget what you think you know about darkness, for the birth of Jesus is the arrival of the morning sun across an endless abyss of night sky.

Forget what you think you know about the reaches of our own imagination, because In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And the Word was made flesh.

Cast off all your preconceived notions of how God is acting—or not acting—in your life and remember that God hasn't stopped speaking. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*

The light of God is here among us today. It is the light that we have been longing for, and it is far more surprising and mysterious than we can possibly imagine.