

## Wesley United Methodist Church

December 24, 2013

“The Light of Christmas.”

Luke 2:1-7, Isaiah 9:6-7a

Welcome on this holiest of nights. I want to begin with a story about a young man named Marty. Marty was a bright, lively eight-year-old who suffered from a minor disability; he was deaf in one ear. He lived in a rural community of farms and fences. Marty’s mom, Diane, was proud of her son. She knew he had a kind and loving heart.

Several weeks before Christmas one year, Marty shared a secret with his mother. He had been doing extra chores and saving up his allowance in order to buy a Christmas present, a pocket compass, for his best friend, Kenny. Kenny was being raised by a single mom and life for this family was a daily struggle just to acquire the most basic of needs of food and clothing.

Diane knew that Kenny’s mom was a very proud woman. Diane doubted that Kenny’s mom would allow Kenny to accept a gift if he couldn’t give one in return. Marty argued with his mother and finally said, “But what if it’s a secret? What if they never found out who gave it?” Diane finally relented. If somehow Marty could give Kenny the gift without anyone knowing who gave it that would be acceptable. So, on “Christmas Eve Diane watched her son walk out the door, cross the wet pasture to slip beneath the electric fence on his mission of kindness.

Marty raced up to Kenny’s door and pressed the doorbell. Then he ran down the steps and across the yard so he wouldn’t be seen. Suddenly, the electric fence loomed in front of him. He could not avoid it. The shock knocked him to the ground and he gasped for breath. Slowly, he got up and stumbled home.

When he got home Diane treated the blisters on Marty’s face caused by the electric fence, then put him to bed. That night as Diane tucked Marty in, she silently complained to God for allowing her son to be hurt when he was performing a good deed. The next day, however, Kenny came to the front door excitedly talking about his new compass. Amazingly, Marty, who was deaf in one ear, seemed to hear Kenny talking with both of his ears.

A few weeks later, a school nurse confirmed what Diane suspected: Marty’s hearing in his deaf ear had been completely restored. Though the doctors said it might have been the shock from the electric fence, Diane believed it was a Christmas miracle.

Christmas is a night for miracles. It is a magical night of wonder and faith. The children are excited. Moms and Dads are excited, too, as they see the bright eyes of their children.

How good it is to hear the prophetic words of Isaiah. “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness as light has dawned...For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

All of us know what it is to walk in darkness at some time in our lives. Darkness comes in many forms loneliness, pain, grief, confusion, heartache. All these emotions seem to be intensified at Christmas.

It is no accident that Christmas falls just after the shortest day of the year. December 21<sup>st</sup>, known as the winter solstice, is usually the shortest day of the year because we receive the least amount of direct sunlight. But at the darkest time of the year, our world turns a corner. From today on, our days will get longer. There will be a little more sunlight each day. Christmas reminds us that light is coming into our world, in a physical sense as well as a spiritual one.

The shepherds out on a Judean hillside knew about darkness in a way that city dwellers cannot. There was no artificial lighting in their world. The only light came from the stars above. So you can imagine how startled they were to be suddenly surrounded by a great light. Luke tells us an angel appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The glory of the Lord is a wonderful thing, but when you are not expecting it, it must have seemed like an alien invasion. The shepherds were terrified. They never had experienced a light like this. But the angel reassured them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good

news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

In the darkness there is a light that shines...and that light is a babe born in Bethlehem. That's the good news for this night. In John 8:12 Jesus says to us, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." If you are experiencing any darkness in your life right now, there is a light dawning, and that light is an infant born to be our Savior.

A pastor once told about the worst nativity pageant he could ever remember. It was at the church where he grew up. The youth group was staging a manger scene. The pastor as a youth was chosen to play Joseph and his future wife was chosen to play Mary. They did their parts with seriousness and commitment looking as pious as possible. And then it came time for the shepherds to enter. The choir was singing "While shepherds watched their flocks by night, and some of their fellow young people dressed in flannel bathrobes and towed head gear proceeded to the altar steps. Young Joseph and Mary both managed to gaze solemnly at the straw which contained a naked light bulb. But then one of the shepherds broke the sacred spell. With his back to the congregation, he said in a very loud whisper for all the cast to hear, "Well, Joe when you gonna pass out cigars?"

The spell of that occasion was not broken by his remark, it exploded. The Mary and Joseph cover was completely destroyed and it became impossible to hold back the bursts of laughter. The chief angel, standing on a chair behind them was the worst. She shook so hard that she fell off the chair and rolled on the floor, holding her stomach. The strains of "Silent Night" and "O Little Town of Bethlehem" were hardly sufficient to cover the uncontrolled snickers. Their good-sported leader said, "The only thing that didn't go to pieces was the light bulb in the manger, it never went out." The light in the manger never goes out regardless of any mess we make of things. That babe has brought light into the world.

It is in the darkest part of the night that we are most prone to see the light of God. When the world needed him most, Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea. But it is also true in our lives, when we need the light of God the most, is when we are most likely to see that light.

There is a wonderful story about a man who was experiencing darkness in his life. The man had suffered a stroke which affected him severely including his speech. He was frustrated because he was unable to communicate with other people. His life was filled with loneliness and some anger. One day his pastor came to visit him. The pastor found it difficult to communicate with him and as he was getting ready to leave he remembered that some stroke victims can sing. So he began to sing, "Silent night, holy night." It seemed like a miracle, as the man also began to sing. He was not stuttering, no breakdown in forming words. He just sang: "Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant so tender and mild." As the man reached for his pastor's hand to hold, he smiled, and "God was there."

If that seems like a miracle, remember that Christmas is a time for miracles. A light shines in the darkness. A babe is born in a manger in Bethlehem. Rejoice, your light has come.