

December 25, 2018 (Christmas Day) – John 1:1-18

There was a famous painter by the name of Thomas Kincade. You may know of him. You've almost certainly seen his work. It's quite popular.

Thomas Kincade became well-known for a particular artistic technique. You see, he could paint dark scenes that don't look dark. It's really quite remarkable.

The whole scene could be shrouded in shadows. Sometimes the sun is setting, casting long silhouettes over the hillsides. Sometimes evening has already fallen and the stars are out. You would expect it would all look very gloomy and somber.

But then, with a stroke of the paintbrush, Kincade added light to the painting. A house will radiate with candlelight from within. The last remnants of a sunset will peak out from the horizon. The moon and stars will cast a reassuring glow from above.

And these individual points of illumination will make the whole painting come alive with hope and comfort, with light and life. Such that it almost feels like someone has stuck lightbulbs in the painting itself. But no, it's all just paint on canvas. And the superb technique of a man who became known as the "Painter of Light."

It's amazing what just a little bit of light can do to change a painting. Of course, that's true of just about anything. Just a little bit of light can change real life too. A single candle can light up a whole room. A single flashlight can light up an entire yard. A single streetlight can light up an entire highway. It doesn't take much light to transform the darkness.

Throughout God's Word, the coming of Jesus has been described as bringing light into the darkness. Our Old Testament lesson last night from Isaiah said that: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."* And our Gospel lesson today says it again: *"In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

This is really, really good news. Because we live in a really dark world. Darkness has always been a symbol of sin and chaos and destruction. In the beginning, Genesis says, there was only darkness and chaos. When God fought to free his people from Egypt, it was darkness that he used to bring destruction on Pharaoh. And the book of Proverbs tells us that a foolish man who rejects God's Law is like a man stumbling around in a dark room.

We live in that darkness today. And ironically, one of the greatest purveyors of darkness are some of the brightest things in our lives. Our TVs. Our computer screens. Our smartphones and tablets.

Day after day, we stare into the glow of these devices as they shine absolute darkness into our eyes. Fear and violence. Lust and greed. Jealousy and bitterness. They're the darkest lights you will ever see.

And we stare into them mostly because we're full of darkness too. The darkness of the world resonates with the darkness of our flesh. We watch violence because we are violent. We watch lust because we are lustful. We're fascinated by stories of greed because we are greedy. On and on it goes.

It feels like such a dark world because it's not just darkness around us. It's darkness within us too. And so it can feel absolutely overwhelming. Like there's nothing that can break it. Nothing that can stop it. Nothing that can possibly make it go away.

But then we read, *"The light shines in the darkness... but the darkness has not overcome it."* And it certainly tried to. Herod, filled with darkness, tried to overcome the light when he ordered the execution of every boy in Bethlehem two years old and younger. But the darkness has not overcome it.

The devil, filled with darkness, tried to overcome the light when he tempted Jesus in the desert with every possible desire of the flesh. But the darkness has not overcome it.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law, filled with darkness, tried to overcome the light when they challenged Jesus day after day in the temple. When they tried to trap him with questions or accuse him of blasphemy. But the darkness has not overcome it.

The chief priests and Pilate, filled with darkness, tried to overcome the light when they put Jesus through an unjust trial. When they mocked him and spit upon him and said all kinds of lies about him. When they tortured him with whips and a crown of thorns. When they nailed him to a cross. They tried to overcome the light.

And they thought they had. When darkness descended upon the earth as Jesus hung on the cross, the devil thought he had overcome the light. The human authorities thought they had overcome the light. His own disciples thought that these powers of darkness had overcome the light.

But that's the thing about light. You don't need much of it to overcome the darkness. A single brushstroke can lighten a painting. A single candle can lighten a dark place. And a single spark of God's light can overwhelm all the forces of Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh.

They thought they had overcome the light. But this light could not be overcome. Because this light was the light of life. The light of the God who spoke light into existence and brought life to all living things. This light could not be overcome by darkness. Least of all the darkness of death.

And yet, there are some who would still rather cling to the darkness. The world was made through him. Light and life were made through him. Yet the world did not know him. He came to his own. To his own creatures. To his own children. And his own did not receive him.

Many still don't. Many would prefer to cling to the darkness. Even on Christmas morning, many would prefer to celebrate anything but the birth of Jesus. Santa Claus. Gifts. Parties. Christmas trees. Christmas carols. Outdoor lighting displays.

Anything that lets them ignore or forget the light who came into the world on Christmas Day. Anything that lets them focus on the darkness of the painting without seeing the brushstroke of light that God brought into our lives.

We are not among them. Don't get me wrong. You and I are no different than anyone else in most ways. We're still sinners. We're still people with darkness in our hearts. Who indulge in the darkness of this world.

The only difference is that there's been a brushstroke of light in our hearts. We are like a Thomas Kincade painting. A canvas that would be so dark and gloomy if not for the warm light of God's Word dwelling within us. Turning this painting of darkness and death into a painting of light and life.

*"To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* Born of God. That is what we are.

So today, we don't just celebrate that Jesus was born of Mary. We celebrate that we are each born of God. We don't just celebrate the tiny light that shines from Jesus' infant face. We celebrate the glory of God, full of grace and truth, that shines from each one of our hearts.

We don't just celebrate Christmas morning. We celebrate the sun of righteousness dawning on all creation. And promising to us a day when darkness will be no more. When the night of sin will be ended and the shadow of death will be gone. For the Lamb upon his throne will bring light and life to a new creation.

We called Thomas Kincade a painter of light. But there's really only one painter of light. He painted the universe with light in the beginning. He painted light in the darkness on Christmas morning. He painted light into our hearts by faith and Holy Baptism. And he will paint the universe with his light of grace on the last day.

Because he is light, we are children of light. And we need never fear darkness again. Amen.