

“The Way of Light”
The Reverend Michael L. Delk
Hickory Neck Episcopal Church – Toano, Virginia
1st Sunday after Christmas – 27 December 2009
John 1:1-18

When Stephanie and I arrived here nearly eight years ago, we were two weeks away from closing on our house and needed a place to stay. Mayes and Cheryl Mathews graciously invited us spend those two weeks at their farmhouse on Forge Road. We left Atlanta, our home for nearly three years, at about 10a.m. and arrived weary but excited at 9p.m.

If you’ve never driven out Forge Road, only one word can adequately describe it at night: dark. We were tired and had never been to the Mathews’, and though we had excellent directions, it felt as if we were driving through a pot of ink. Eventually, after much wandering about and frustrated muttering, we found our way, guided by signs and balloons welcoming us to our new Church family.

As I got out of the car, I looked up and saw stars that I had rarely seen over the past three years. In Atlanta, there are so many lights and enough pollution that you could gaze into the night sky and see the moon, Venus, the North Star, and maybe Mars, but little if anything else. That night nearly eight years ago, outside the Mathews’ home, I was stunned by what I could see: light streaming down through an enveloping darkness, some of it arriving after a billion-year journey. I was delighted, and I continue to rejoice in the fact that at our home, in a much more closely inhabited neighborhood, I can make out most constellations, and occasionally spot the silvery trace of the Milky Way.

The light that came down from heaven in Jesus Christ is likewise stunning and delightful and cause for great celebration. Despite the prevalence of artificial light, our world remains very

dark in a spiritual sense. The darkness makes people afraid, because we cannot see what's out there. That insecurity induces people to make choices that cause harm, not least to themselves.

Yet into this darkness, God saw fit to send a Son, whose light brings understanding into the midst of prejudice and ignorance. The light of Christ shines on our path, freeing us from our fearful paralysis, so that we can move forward with our lives. The light reveals the truth of God's Word, the wonder of God's creation, and the hope we share in salvation for life everlasting.

So it is right that in this Christmastide, and at each Sabbath, and indeed on every day, we rejoice and give thanks for that which we cannot do without or make on our own, but which comes as pure gift: undeserved, often unwelcome, yet always available to us.

We cannot repay the astonishing generosity God has shown through sending His Son. However, we can respond in faithful ways that show our gratitude. Among the faithful avenues open to us, we can be like John, who testified to the light, so that others who somehow fail to see it, may realize that there is a way out of the darkness. Our witness to the light can also help those who have once gazed upon it, but find it too bright. With kindness and encouragement, those who have turned away to dwell in darkness can be coaxed into a loving relationship with our Savior, so that they too can walk the Way of Life with clarity of purpose and freedom from fear.

Few people knew when it first came who the Light was, and what he meant. Over 2,000 years of devotion and careful attention, our insight has deepened. Yet the gift humbles us still, as our efforts have chiefly gained us a keener awareness that even the wisest, the most knowledgeable, the most pious among us will never fathom the full meaning of the mystery of God Incarnate, man divine.

This can be off-putting to some. Indeed, even the most faithful can falter and stray from the Light. We may find the Light, at times, a bit too intense and revealing; exposing things within us we would rather keep hidden. Our shame and guilt at these unwanted discoveries may drive us from the Light. But it shines on, beckoning us like a lighthouse on the shore to navigate the treacherous course with constancy, so that we might make it home safe. The Light shines on, because it knows that we know deep down inside that the Light may expose our shadows, but for the most part it reflects off of shinier stuff, for God made us good, and sin has never managed to obliterate from any of us the image of the Maker in whose likeness we are made.

Remember this whenever you find yourself in a dark place, long after sunset or during the brightness of the day. The Light of Christ shines for you and for all who choose to dwell in its piercing embrace. May we rush to dwell there, where fear evaporates and ignorance disintegrates; a place where all may walk the Way in confidence, freedom, and peace. Amen.