



# Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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## Light and Defiant Faith

By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

My wife Patty and I have learned a lot from our good friend Nina about noticing the power of light. Nina is fascinated with the way light changes things. Take, for instance, the power of theatrical lighting to change the mood and the whole feeling of a scene as it is darkened or lightened. Because of Nina's early January birthday, she always reminds us that the light is lengthening ever so slowly then, and that the days are getting longer.

The season of Epiphany – sandwiched between Christmas and Lent – is about remembering and celebrating the spread of the light of Christ and Christ's message into the world.

As I write this, it is a sunny January day with a crystal clear, deep-blue sky. This is uncharacteristic for us lately, as we've had many gray, rainy, or snowy days. You start to miss the light. This is what is noteworthy as I am writing this. It is after 5 o'clock, and there is, in fact, still light! Just a couple of weeks ago that would not have been the case. Sometimes the darkness can seem so deep, so thick, that it is easy to forget the light. And yet the light is now lengthening by a minute or two each day. In fact, this is where we get the word "Lent," a Middle English word meaning "spring," and reflecting the fact that the days are lengthening in the Northern Hemisphere as we approach Easter.

This makes me think of the majestic prologue to St. John's Gospel, which we heard during the Christmas Season: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). That is a statement of defiant faith – a trusting faith that doesn't deny the darkness, but a faith that believes more in the power of the light.

This is how Christians are called to live in this world. We are not to deny wars, crime, prejudice, hatred, materialism, and all the rest. We are not immune to these forces, ourselves. But we believe we are allied with a force which is more powerful and more lasting: the good, the holy, and the righteous.

A priest I admire speaks of our call as Christians to be “love-spreading difference-makers.” In other words, the light is supposed to radiate out from us, by God’s grace, to a world so desperately in need of light.

Sometimes this radiating light comes down to treating people as people, not as a means to some kind of end for our benefit. Frequently, it means getting out of ourselves and our self-absorption, so that we can be present with others.

Often it means letting it be known that we are Christians and that we believe:

- God loves us and loves this world
- Forgiveness and a fresh start are our birthright
- God is not finished with us yet

I rejoice in the growing light of these lengthening days, even as I know that, come June, the pattern will reverse. This is where the metaphor of the sun’s light falls short. The eternal God of the universe, who has chosen to love us so much, does not wax and wane like the natural light. Our response to that great love of God does wax and wane but thank God for the constancy of the true Light of the world. Thank God we are called to be children of that light, in whom “there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

If this message inspires you to think of the spirited hymn we often sing, take a listen to this powerful choral version of “[I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light.](#)”