

Our Christmas Eve plans had a problem. The 11:00 PM service was fine – lessons and carols and candles – elegant and evocative. The 4:00 PM service caused concern. Would it be dark enough to light candles? Would we have that glorious moment when all our candles are lit, the lights dim, and we let our light shine? As one person put it, “It’s just not Christmas Eve without candles.”

Once Daylight Savings Time arrived, we realized we had no problem. Shorter days and longer nights will give us plenty of opportunity to let our light shine!

We long for light at this time of year; we put lights on our trees; lights in our windows; lights on our homes. We long for light because we know so much of darkness. We long for light in the hope that there is more to life than darkness; that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Last week, we heard the message of John the Baptist –prepare God’s new way! This week, we reflect on his witness: *John 1:8-9 (NRSV) He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*¹There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Ah, but it’s not so easy to overcome tunnel vision.

The scene is almost comical. Here’s locust-eating, honey drinking, John in all his camel haired glory dripping with repentance, and there on the banks of the Jordan huddles the Establishment. “John, you’re from a priestly lineage. You don’t belong out here. Priests belong in the Temple not the river. Help us understand.”

“I’m not the Messiah.”

“What? Messiah? Do you think we think you are the Messiah? What made you think of that? Are you Elijah?”

“No.”

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

“Are you the prophet?”

“I am not.”

“John, we have a report to file! What do you say about yourself? Why are you baptizing?”

John didn't fit their preconceived notions. They thought they had it all figured out. They had God down pat; everything was under control. Their message was, “Stick with the status quo. Stop looking for a light at the end of the tunnel and stay safe with our tunnel vision. Trust the experts. We know what we're doing.”

John didn't play it safe. He didn't fit their preconceived notions. Joy rarely does. Joy erupts. Joy disrupts. We never see it coming. It's a surprise. That's what makes it fun.

Advent invites us to consider – are we open to God's surprise, or do preconceived notions about God or about ourselves keep us from experiencing joy? Can we see God's new thing, or can we only see what fits with our tunnel vision of the way it is?

John's eyes are open. He lost his tunnel vision in the wilderness and left his preconceived notions behind. He doesn't resist; he rejoices: *John 1:26-27 (NRSV) “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”*² There is a light at the end of the tunnel!

Open your eyes to God's surprise. A baby in a manger is the Messiah? Surprise. A crucified convict is our Savior? Surprise. There's a light in the tomb; the dead will live again? Surprise, surprise, surprise.

Open your eyes to God's surprise. Close your eyes to tunnel vision. Let go of your preconceived notions that confine what God can do to the limits of your understanding.

Open your eyes. There's a light at the end of the tunnel. Amen.

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.