

Going to Michigan and seeing our grand children is always a delight. My grand children have a way of lighting up my life. They have a way of pulling on my heart strings like no other. One of the things they like doing to get my undivided attention is to sing the songs they know. And at ages 2 and 3 Twinkle Twinkle Little Star is one of the top picks in their repertoire. Twinkle Twinkle Little star; how I wonder what you are; up above the world so high; like a diamond in the sky. Twinkle twinkle little star; how I wonder what you are. Priceless when they sing it. A star gift for my soul. A twinkle of grace.

Besides doting over the kids, we usually visit the Christian Reformed Church bookstore in Grand Rapids. And this year an interesting book was twinkling for my attention. It's called *The Day Metallica Came to Church*. In the first chapter a strange story is told. (read it on line at the site listed in the bulletin - metallicaatchurch.org) Can you imagine starting our worship service with four heavy metal, head banging, eardrum shattering songs by the famous rock band Metallica? And then to top it off, hearing a sermon on the gospel according to Metallica? Well it happened in New Hope Church in Calgary, and it all started when the Pastor, John was given a pair of tickets to a Heavy Metal rock concert by Metallica.

Now as most of us know, heavy metal music is dark and druggy, and angry and so loud most people over 30 can't stand it. As a matter of fact many preachers and church people say Metallica is of the devil and is part of the darkness of our pagan culture, destroying the moral fiber of our kids and our communities. And most parents, especially Christian parents, ban Metallica from their kids ipods & mp3 players. But when Pastor John attended the heavy metal Metallica concert in Calgary he noticed the twinkling of a star in the darkness. And instead of cursing the darkness, he highlighted for many people something the gospel of John tells us in that great Christmas poem we read during advent and is repeated here in the Magi story.

In explaining the birth of Jesus, John says: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. It was with God in the beginning. All things were made through it. Without it nothing was made that has been made. In it (God-Word) was LIFE and that life was the light of all people. The source of all life and all creation. That god-light shines continually in the darkness and has been since the beginning, and the darkness has not been able to overcome it.

The magi of Matthew 2, the wise men from China according to USA today Dec 12 (quoting a Harvard professor), lived in a dark pagan culture, far removed from the cradle of Christianity. They dabbled in the occult arts, and astrology, and magical healing, and human philosophy and religion. One dark night they were watching the black sky and noticed an unusual light shining in the darkness. It was the twinkling of a star. The

twinkling of god-light in creation and culture. Some people in wondering about that star claim was “Jupiter emerging in the east as a morning star in the zodiac sign of the Jews, Aries the Ram. This was in the year 6 BC. The account in Matthew, according to the Yale professor (Prof. Bradley E. Schaefer, Yale University) , refers twice to the Star being in the east with good reasons. When the royal star of Zeus, the planet Jupiter, was in the east this was the most powerful time to confer kingships according to their pagan beliefs.”

And so using the splendor of creation and the Oscars of culture and the glory of the heavens the spirit of God shows the twinkling of that light that shines in the darkness, that John talks about, to attract the attention of pagan gentile people and guide them to the Star of David. To the True Light of the World. The morning star of Revelation 22. These magi of the east were the cultural heroes of their time, the Kobies, and Michael Jacksons and Nancy Palosis and the Miley Cyruses, and the Metallicas of their time, by pursuing their cultural passions, and dabbling in their golden globe productions, and their Staple center showdowns and concert, and their NASA discoveries they were led by the twinkling of god-light – a star gift - to find the child, born in Bethlehem, known as the King of the Jews. And when they found him they were over awed and overjoyed. They bowed down and worshiped Jesus and opened the treasures of their culture and their treasures of their lives and offered them to the child. This child pulled on their heart like no other and life was never the same.

This strange star story like that of Metallica coming to Church, or the testimony of Julie Taylor spoken of in Adriana’ pastors reflection in the bulletin, shows that we can see and hear God in the most unlikely places. This story shows us that the twinkling of grace, and the star-gifts of the god Word are present everywhere and can be seen even in the darkness of a heavy metal concert or a cancer ward or the pagan cultures of the east. We just need to have our eyes open to the light that shines in the darkness. And if we receive that light, and believe and follow that light on our journey, John says, we will be led to see the Glory of God and experience the fullness of his grace and the fullness of his truth, and the power of his presence. Isn’t that that your hope for 2011?

This morning we celebrate the Lord’s supper, our Spiritual New Year’s meal. The meal that gives energy and hope for the journey ahead. We too live in a dark time and a dark culture; we often experience the absence of God in our lives, the absence of grace, and truth and well being in our lives. Today as we look at the coming year, we wonder about what will happen when the economy turns further south, and jobs go east. We wonder about the moral fiber of our country and its great political divide and the anger that is stirred up against each other. We wonder about our health, about pollutions, about the future of our grand children, our schools and our marriages. We worry about our church and our homes, and the great and expanding divide and hatred between the rich and poor.

We wonder about the number of homeless people and the threat of nuclear terrorism. We pray for the hungry and the children in our cancer wards. The times may be hard in 2011, our experiences may be dark, but the gospel of John and the twinkling stars of grace tell us in no uncertain terms that that Word that gives life, that Word that give light became flesh and blood. That light became bread and drink so that we could experience the presence and providence and protection and the pleasure of God in our lives, the reality of God in our lives, just like the Magi of the east experienced him in Bethlehem and were overjoyed.

Today as we remember how the star in the east was a gift of God to a bunch of very unlikely people, so we would like to give and receive a star gift to remind us of God's grace to us. Even now if our eyes are open, the twinkles of grace are all around us. God's presence is tangible. The bread and the cup are gifts that pull at our heart strings and lead us to glory. A meal shared, a visit made, an act of greed resisted, an encourage word shared, an offering made. A child song sung. A child's prayer prayed. A song of forgiveness at a heavy metal concert. All twinkles of grace, star gifts for the soul.

The star word you will receive at this table is not the Word that shines in the darkness, but it is a star-gift that can lead you on the 2011 journey and may even guide you into a deep knowing of God. If put this star-gift in a prominent place it can remind you each day that Immanuel- God with us has come. His grace and his presence are there even when it doesn't feel like it.

So now I invite you to come to the table. Read John 8:12

Gather around the table, pass out bread & cup. Sing Open Our Eyes as a prayer. Eat & drink. When returning the cups take a star-gift from the table. On it you will find a word to guide you and speak to you during 2011.

Sing Shine Jesus Shine, receive the benediction & hold hands and sing our exit song; My friends go in peace.