

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 2nd Sunday after Christmas, January 4, 2015

**Mind the Gap, Mind the Light**

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Matthew 2:1-12 John 1:1-18

If you have ever been to London, England you probably know what the Underground is. It is an extensive network of subways which conveniently take you anywhere in that great city. It is rare that you can't find an underground stop within a short walking distance of any place you might want to go in the city. It is convenient and inexpensive and the result is that most people rarely drive anywhere and many, in fact, don't even own cars. One thing that is unusual about the Underground is that, because of small stations and curves in the track, the subway cars don't always line up close to the station platforms. The middle doors of the cars are often several inches away from the platform and you have to be careful not to get your foot caught in the gap between the platform and the car as you are boarding or getting off. You need to look down and watch where you are putting your feet to avoid the gap.

There was a recent news story about a person who did not mind the gap and got their foot caught between the platform and a subway car. Not a problem. The passengers got off of the car, pushed on its side, tilted the car enough for the person to get free. Everyone reboarded the car and it was on its way almost as if this was an everyday event. It wasn't a big deal for the unflappable Brits.

In this country, OSHA regulations and as safety conscious as we are, there would likely be signs on the sides of the cars or the doors, or even bells or flashing lights to get your attention.

Not so in England. The English wouldn't consider that to be proper. Instead, in their casual way of doing things, the only reminder to be careful is the words "Mind the Gap" which are on the edge of the platforms. Of course, if you weren't looking down you wouldn't see those words and if you were looking down the words would not be necessary because the gap would be obvious to you. But, that is what they do in England. They just aren't as concerned about things like this as we are.

When I have been to England I rather liked their casual warnings, "Mind the Gap" on the Underground platforms, "Look Right" or "Look Left" on street corners at traffic

lights to remind you to be aware of oncoming cars, and so on.

Now, what does that have to do with today's scripture passage from John? Our scripture reading too is a reminder to us, a reminder to be aware of who Christ is, God's light in our world --- a reminder to "mind the light" if you will.

James W. Moore wrote an advent study book entitled "Finding Bethlehem in the Midst of Bedlam" which devotes one chapter to today's gospel reading. The title of that chapter is "Mind the Light", a casual, almost British way, of reminding us what the birth of Christ means.

You may recall my earlier messages about today's gospel reading. On the first Sunday of January last year I gave a sermon on this passage and, in fact, only three Sundays ago during Advent, I talked about it.

Why does this passage appear so often in the Lectionary? Most readings are used only once every three years but portions of today's reading from John are often used every year.

The reason is that John 1:1-18 is so fundamental to our faith that it bears frequent repeating. I have told you before that John 1:1-5 is my favorite passage of scripture, so much so that it is written on a scroll inside of a mezuzah, a Jewish-style scripture holder on the door post of our home.

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" --- or, saying it another way, "In the beginning was Christ, and Christ was with God, and Christ was God."*

Verses 4 and 5 say, *"<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

In his book, James Moore says, *"How do you express the birth of Jesus Christ to our world? How do you do justice to his birth? How do you capture the impact? How do you communicate what it means?"* That was the quandary of the writers of the Bible.

Moore goes on to say, *"Words were inadequate, so they tried to express it through dramatic poetic analogy. They compare it to light coming into a world of darkness! Now, that's a dramatic way to put it, isn't it? It was dark, and the light turned on. God's light came into our dark world."* **Mind the light!**

Moore tells us to mind the light of peace, mind the light of hope, and mind the light of love.

Jesus is the light of peace, the light of hope and the light of love. **Mind the light!**

Our scripture reading from Matthew is customarily read when the traditional Christmas season ends at Epiphany, January 6<sup>th</sup>, the twelfth day of Christmas when the Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate the birth of our Lord and when we celebrate the visit of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the gentiles. Their valuable gifts to the Christ child of gold, frankincense and myrrh, three gifts like those in the small chests on the communion table this morning, enabled the holy family to be able to flee to Egypt and live there until the death of King Herod when they were able to return safely to Judea. Christians will still be celebrating Christmas until Epiphany, two days from now, celebrating the gifts to the Christ child, celebrating the light of peace, celebrating the light of hope and celebrating the light of love. That is something that we should do all year, not just at the Christmas season.

As Moore put it, *“Whenever and wherever people are working for peace, there is the spirit of Christmas ... mind the light of peace.”*

*“If you want to please God, if you want to live in the light of Christmas, accept Christ as your Savior as the hope of your world and share that hope with others. Mind the light ... of hope.”*

*“When we stand tall for love, we find Bethlehem. If you want to please God, if you want to live in the spirit of Christmas, then stand tall for love. Mind the light ... of love.”*

Today’s gospel reading from John reminds us of the light. Just as the British don’t need signs on their subway cars and bells and flashing lights to remind them to mind the gap other than simple words on the edge of the Underground platforms, Christians don’t need blatant reminders to mind the light of peace, the light of hope and the light of love.

The only reminders we should need are our daily prayers, worshipping together each Sunday, reading scripture and remembering the words of John 1, particularly the first five verses. The Living Bible states these five verses this way <sup>1-2</sup> Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. <sup>3</sup> He created everything there is—nothing exists that he didn’t make. <sup>4</sup> Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind. <sup>5</sup> His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it. **Mind the light.**

**Alleluia! Amen.**