**The Light in the Darkness 2017 12 13**

**John 1:6-8, 19-28 Pr. Hitoshi Adachi**

May the grace and peace of the Lord be poured into people’s hearts in this sanctuary!

Advent season always comes at the end of calendar year. How do you feel about the year 2017, as you reflect on your own life? What are your thoughts as you ponder what happened in the world? Of course, this year was the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, but to me, during this year, my family members included, many people I know moved from their own homes to different levels of assisted-living facilities.

To be honest, many of my family’s and friends’ lives don’t seem that great this year. And then, when I look at the world, there were reports of North Korean missiles almost all the time and in recent weeks we saw heated disagreement about the US’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. I think it’s a reality that the world is deeply divided in many aspects.

And when I listen to opinions of sociologists and global economic specialists, it seems that those divisions may become even worse in the coming decades. I do not think we can deny that the world’s darkness is seemingly becoming even darker.

However, when I reflect upon how I felt as I read the Bible verses and pondering God’s word, this year was the first year in my half century of Christian life that I felt God’s focused mercy very clearly without being bothered by uncertainty. When the world becomes darker, the focus of the Bible, which is God’s love, the light of Jesus Christ becomes clearer.

When we think about the time when Jesus was born in this world 2000 years ago, I think there were similar aspects to our age. The conditions of Israel and Mediterranean world were getting darker and the divisions between political and religious leaders and ordinary people were increasing.

The Roman Empire was controlling Israel. Jews were expected to contribute to Jewish temples and to also pay taxes to the Empire. Their economy was seemingly improving. Although I do not think that there were statistical indexes such as Gross Domestic Product at that time, but if there were, the index might be getting larger since more cash was flowing into and being utilized by the Roman Empire.

However, those monies were mainly utilized by leaders for military expenses and not necessarily for societal improvement. I believe that the poorest segment of the society was expanding. In the darkness of society, the messiah’s birth was yearned for very strongly. Then as we all know, according to scripture, God sent Jesus Christ into the poorest of poor areas, a manger in a barn. He was the light that the Baptist John was witnessing and speaking about.

And that light made the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the dead live again. However, humanity killed the light. The light was crucified, God raised and resurrected the light. Many ordinary folks started to believe the light, Jesus Christ, who was resurrected and ascended, however the leaders of Judaism and the Roman Empire started persecuting the believers of Jesus Christ.

Most of the twelve disciples were persecuted and killed. In the regions of the Roman Empire, Christian persecution lasted almost three hundred years until the time of the First Council of Nicaea, in 325. During the age of persecution, the light did not stop being the light in the Mediterranean world.

Human societies continued Christian persecutions alternating the places and times in world history. In Japan where I grew up, from the beginning of the 17th century toward the end of 19th century, Christian believers were sentenced to death. Even when persecutions were repeated, the light did not stop being the light.

The Love of God, Jesus Christ, continued being the light to the people, the creatures of God, in the darkness. We know starlight shines more brightly when it becomes darker. The light never disappeared or abandoned the people in this world.

At the beginning of last week, I was watching Nobel Prize Award Ceremony. This year, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. During the ceremony, I was moved by Setsuko Thurlow’s speech, she is a survivor from the Hiroshima atomic bomb attack.

Right after the bombing, she found herself pinned by the rubble of a collapsed building. Then, suddenly, she felt hands touching her left shoulder, and heard a man saying: "Don't give up! Keep pushing! I am trying to free you. See the light coming through that opening?"

I would say her life was changed by the light that the Baptist John was witnessing. And that light is still changing the world even now. Even though the world’s divisions are seemingly increasing, the light continues being light.

Even when we consider issues of world peace, the divisions between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states are seemingly increasing, however the light is flooding God’s love and salvation into the darkness. In this Advent season, we should gladly and joyfully proclaim the good news that the light has come to the world, since we were born into the world to testify about our beloved, blessed light, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.