

May the Force be With You!
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Immanuel Lutheran Church
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John 1:1-18

The first *Star Wars* movie came out in 1977. It is amazing that 42 years later they are still making *Star Wars* movies! Some of you have probably been in the theaters recently to see *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*. I haven't made it to see this one yet, though I hope to. But all the talk this movie has generated, has had me thinking about what has given this series such staying power.

It deals with eternal questions of good and evil – light and darkness. Some of the characters who start out as good give into the dark side like Anakin Skywalker, who starts out as a Jedi knight but is transformed into Darth Vader. He had been warned in a dream that his wife would die in childbirth. So, he wanted to save her. His motives were good – but in trying to save her, he went over to the dark side. Much of the rest of the *Star Wars* epic springs from that fateful decision.

You also have those who start out as villains and are redeemed – like Han Solo. As a child, he was a street orphan who got sucked into a life of crime to survive. He spent the early decades of his life as an intergalactic smuggler. But then he connects with Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia, and gets involved fighting for good.

Throughout the *Star Wars* series, there are many twists and turns where characters find out that they have dark and light sides of themselves. How they respond to their darkness and to what extent they embrace the light has consequences of galactic proportions.

As we are drawn into the *Star Wars* saga, we can all see a bit of ourselves in these characters. We notice the light and the darkness, and realize we are a mix of the two. As we watch these characters battle between the light and darkness inside themselves, we recognize that we face these same struggles with light and darkness that they do.

As we worship this day before Epiphany, it is a time to think about light and darkness, good and evil and the role it plays in our lives. Our gospel lesson for today is John's version of the Christmas story. It doesn't mention a manger or baby, there is no talk of angels or shepherds or wise men. In fact, the language of this Christmas story sounds more like the language at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has

come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people (John 1:1-4).

This sounds more like a creation story than a Christmas story! A little later John goes on to say, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The writer of the Gospel of John wanted to show the connection between Jesus and God. He wanted to signal to us that this is part of a story that is as old as creation. And he draws richly on the image of light and darkness. John goes on to say, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5).

What a hopeful message that is! The darkness did not overcome the light. Light is stronger than darkness. In the epic battle between good and evil, between light and darkness, light wins! But sometimes it takes a while before that victory of light over darkness is apparent.

From the time of our first great grandparents, that battle between good and evil, light and darkness, has colored all of human history. The original sin came from good motives, wanting to be like God. But in seeking to do this, Adam and Eve were tempted by the dark side. They opposed God's goodness and since then humanity has been involved in an epic struggle between good and evil, light and darkness.

Jesus came to lead people out of the darkness. Jesus came to lead us from places of sin and darkness into God's love and light. Jesus came so that we don't have to stay in the darkness. Darkness is a place of fear. Darkness is a place of confusion. Darkness is a place of sin.

In the third chapter of John, Jesus said:

The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God (John 3:19-21).

We can all relate to the notion of darkness and light because as humans, it speaks to who we are. Jesus came as the Light of the World to bring light and life to all people. Jesus came to help us in that cosmic struggle between good and evil, to light our way and show us the pathway to God. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

As Jesus brings light to the world, he shares God's light with us and he gives us some responsibilities. We are to be sources of light and life for those around us. We are to live our lives in ways that reveal God's love.

Even as we live in the light, we know that we are not the light. We are vessels that reflect the light of God. We are a mix of light and darkness, of sinner and saint. Yet, we reflect the light embodied in Jesus, God's Son.

As we look to the heavens, the sun burns brightly during the day and the moon illuminates the sky at night. If it were not for the sun's bright light, you would never see moonlight. The moon is just a big rock in the sky. It has no light power of its own. It reflects the light of the sun. So too, we reflect the light of God's Son. As we do, we rely not on our own power but on God's power. As we reflect God's love and light, we live as God's people and people's eyes are opened to seeing God at work in and among us. Our lives are our witness. Our lives point to the God who brings us light and life.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus reminded us:

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Each one of us has a role to play in this cosmic battle between light and darkness, good and evil. Each one of us is charged with living in the light and reflecting that light to others. Each one of us has the privilege and the obligation of passing the light of God's love on to others.

On Christmas Eve, as we sang *Silent Night*, the candlelight passed from one person to the next. There is a holy quality about it as the light gently spreads through the sanctuary. We sing "Silent night, holy night! Son of God, Love's pure light..." It is a reminder that we are living into that role of spreading the light of God from one person to the next. It is a reminder that we are children of the light. Jesus frees us from the darkness of sin, so that we can live in the light and let our lights shine for all the world to see.

As characters in this divine drama, we have one big advantage. We know how the story ends. We know that this epic battle between good and evil, light and darkness, will be won. As it was revealed in the book of Revelation we read:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 21:1-6a).

And it concludes with these words:

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Revelation 21:22-27).

That’s the end. That’s it! That’s how the story ends. The epic battle between good and evil, is won. God will dwell with his people. Jesus, the Lamb, will be at his side. There will be no more death or crying or pain. There will be no more need for any *Star Wars* or any other kind of wars because nations will come together in peace in the holy presence of God. All will be safe. All evil will be gone. All who are named and claimed as God’s beloved children, whose names are written in the Book of Life, will live together with God in peace and harmony.

That cosmic battle between light and darkness is won. This holy city will be filled with the Light of God’s Love shining on all people. God’s Light will shine so bright there is no need for sun or moon. All will be illuminated by radiant beams from God’s holy face filled with the dawn of redeeming grace. What a perfect ending to that cosmic battle between light and darkness!

May the Force (of God’s love) be with you! Amen!