



All About the Atrium

CGSUSA Parent Newsletter

The Great Light

Is it surprising to know that even in the womb, babies can tell the difference between light and dark? At birth, they are able to see shapes by following the lines where light and dark meet. In the darkness of their bedroom, the young child finds comfort in the warm glow of a lamp or nightlight. However, it is not only the youngest among us that seek the protection and hope that light brings. The older child discovers assurance when yielding a flashlight to guide along a shadowy and uneven path. As adults, we too, seek support when we find ourselves in those places where our footing is unsure, and our sight limited. The physiological changes in the eye mean that the ability to see steadily deteriorates from a young age. By the time people reach the age of 75, they need twice as much light as normal standards recommend and as much as four times as a twenty year old, in order to see satisfactorily. Scientists have learned that light plays an important role in dementia patients' circadian rhythm, which regulates sleep and wake cycles. From the beginning of our existence, light plays an integral role in our development and shaping who we are and how we respond to life.

If we look at the beginning of the creation story, in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1:3, we read that God created light on the first day. What could this light be? Was it the sun, the moon, the stars? No, we read later that they were created on the fourth day. And how does God create light? He speaks, and it is so: "Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light." From the first moments of creation, God is sharing the gift of the light with the world. Throughout sacred scripture, we come to know the Light that is proclaimed is God's presence among his people.

In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the catechists and the children know about the importance of the great light. Sofia Cavalletti, the co-founder of CGS, knew that light was physiologically satisfying for the young child. In Chapter Five of The Religious Potential of the Child, she writes, "Light has an immediate effect on the sense and it is psychologically gratifying and reassuring; thus the child associates this image of Christ the Light with the Good Shepherd and consequently the effect of the former image is reinforced. Furthermore, it is well known what importance the image of Christ-Light has had, especially in relation to Baptism, in the entire Christian tradition beginning with Saint Paul and the Church Fathers up to our present understanding of Liturgy."

Advent is our time of waiting and preparing for the Feast of Christmas. Cavalletti tells us that we see that the younger children easily focus on the joyful anticipation of the gift that is to come. "To enrich their knowledge of that gift and thus their joyful anticipation of its coming, we offer five messianic prophecies over two to three years in the level 1 atrium." We ponder with the children the words of the prophet Isaiah, found in the first verse of Chapter Nine:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

We explore the image of light, sharing what kinds of light do we know? What does light do for us? The children eagerly share about the variety of light they have experienced, and all that light can do for us, in helping us see, in allowing us to know which way we are to go, and to keep us safe and warm. We wonder together about who or what is this light for whom the people waited for such a long time? Who are we waiting for during the season of Advent? Who is Mary waiting for? We share the words of the prophet with the young child, as an avenue for exploring with the child the mystery of who Jesus is. We meditate with the children about the prophecies to offer them a striking image of the coming Messiah, an image of the nature of the Messiah. Often with joy, the little ones will recognize Jesus as the Light promised. Their understanding fills their artwork with light. The children grow in their understanding of the light. The older child begins to ponder more deeply about the light, wondering if this light has shown on everyone? They begin to work with timelines where the color yellow will identify the moment of redemption, when Jesus was born, and that same color adorns the span of the timeline to indicate the spread of the light of Christ. They come to know that God is light and in him there can be no darkness. In our Baptism we have received the inextinguishable light of the Risen Christ. We are called to live as children of light. The older children are given moral parables and maxims of Jesus to help them put on the "armor of light" so that he or she can walk as a child of the light.

Conversation on the Prophecy of the Valleys and the Mountains (Isaiah 40:3-5)

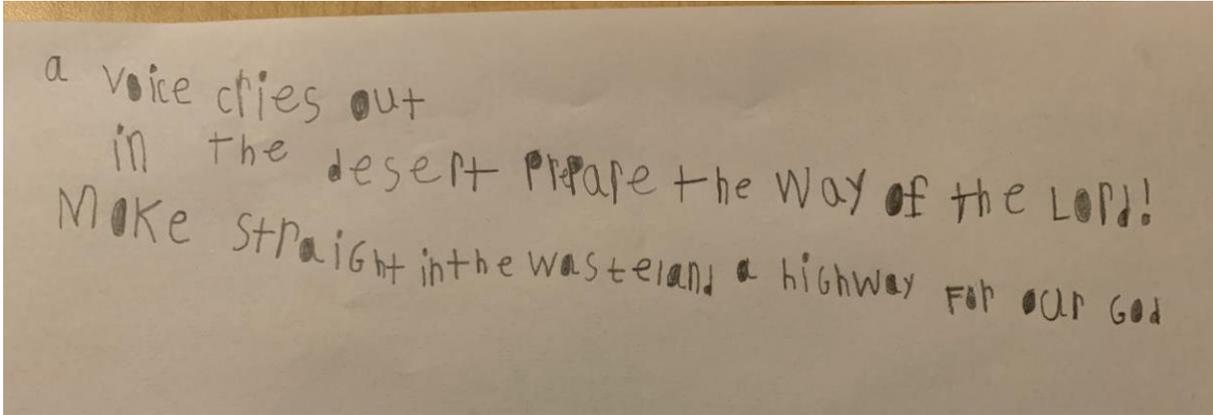
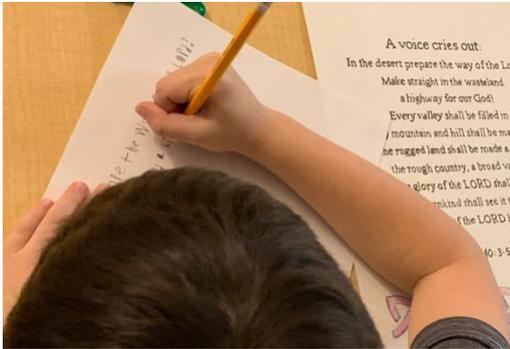
Catechist: Can you see the glory of the Lord if you are in a deep valley or behind a mountain?

Micah: The valley could be filled in with God's love, so then we can see the glory.

Catechist: I wonder what the glory of the Lord looks like?

Micah: It looks like love.

Micah carefully copied of the words of the prophet Isaiah (right and below). Both the young child and the older child enjoy copying scripture.



As we enjoy the decorations and lights that are common to this season, let us pray that all of our children find great delight in the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah about the coming of the great light. May the days of waiting and preparation for the feast of Christmas, be a time of great joy, as we allow the light to form and identify each of us as one who bears the light of Christ to the world.