

MAY

"The Light of Christ" by Deaconess Brenda Bauer

Hymn Suggestion

"O God of Light" (ELW #507, LSB #836)

Scripture

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105

"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1:78-79

Devotion

Florence Nightingale is thought to be the founder of nursing. In truth, there were *krankenschwestern* (sisters of the sick or ill) prior to Florence. These were deaconesses -- women who chose not to marry, entered a motherhouse and there provided services of charity. In 1851, Florence Nightingale took training at *Kaiserswerther Diakonie* in Germany, one of the original deaconess motherhouses. There she learned the basics of caring for the sick, dedicated her life to being a nurse and expanded this vocation into the secular world, including field service during the Crimean War.

Florence Nightingale was known as "the lady with the lamp". Nightly, she quietly checked on the patients. Her face and silhouette were illuminated by the lamp as she made her rounds. It provided assurance and comfort for those on their beds or cots who felt the darkness of fear, pain, isolation, and death surrounding them.

As a deaconess nurse, I have walked with persons who were caught and trapped in darkness -- sometimes physically or mentally, sometimes in deepest spiritual despair. I've also worked as a hospice nurse.

A dying person sometimes becomes agitated by the room's overhead lighting or cannot rest with a switched-on room light. A small lamp brought just enough light to assure them of my presence and that they were not alone. It allowed me to perform the



nursing functions and care needed. At times, hope and light are brought not visually, but through touch, words, music, or gentle nursing care. With light adapted to the unique needs of each person, my goal was to demonstrate Christ's love and light in ways to bring hope, peace, and mercy.

Amazingly, sometimes I was the one who experienced the light. One such time, I was with a mentally-challenged dying young woman. Her mother had told us that if she spoke of seeing angels, we should tell her that she could go with them. Caring for her, I noticed her staring off to the corner of the room and asked what she was seeing. She said, "Oh, just the angels." I relayed her mother's message and, very matter-of-factly, she replied, "I will wait until mom is here." I knew this was a holy moment.

Another came when an elderly woman, dying from unsuccessful surgery was being disconnected from the respirator. As the machines were turned off, she suddenly opened her eyes, lifted herself ever so softly off the bed and pillows, and gave a huge smile. When she rested her body back on the bed, she no longer breathed. I knew she had seen heaven or our Lord. She now was following the light of Christ on a new path. And I thought, Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Have you experienced a time when you felt held in darkness?
- Was there a person who was the light of Christ to you? How was it shown?
- How do you demonstrate being the light of Christ to others?

Prayer

Oh Lord, Jesus. Come into our lives with your light of redemption and healing. May this light shine through us bringing guidance for those who are trapped and held in darkness of their mind, body, or spirit. May your spirit give us the gifts to discern how to be the Light of Christ. Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Brenda Bauer, RN, served as a nurse, faith community nurse, and chaplain/spiritual care provider throughout her 40+ years of ministry. She is now retired.

National Nurses Week begins each year May 6 and ends May 12, Florence Nightingale's birthdate.