The Light of Hope

Of David.
The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid? — Psalm 27:1

Today is the second day of Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, a celebration of two miracles: the victory of the Jews over the Greeks and the single flask of oil that kept the Temple menorah burning for eight days.

Hanukkah is best known for the miracle that occurred when one night’s worth of oil kept the Temple menorah lit for that night and an additional seven more nights. However, if that’s the case, then shouldn’t we celebrate Hanukkah for only seven nights? It was natural for the oil to last the first night; nothing miraculous about that. Only the seven following nights went beyond nature.

The Jewish sages explain that the miracle of the first night of Hanukkah was that they found the oil at all. When the Jews recaptured the Temple and entered it for the first time, it was a heart-wrenching site. The beloved House of God was completely in ruins; the holy site, defiled. The Jews searched for oil to light the menorah, to bring some light to the darkness. But every jar that they found had been opened and defiled. Finally, one tiny jar was found that remained intact with the seal of the High Priest, indicating that the oil was pure. It would take eight days to produce more pure oil, but on that night, the Jews rejoiced at the miracle that they could at least have light for one day and night. That was the miracle of the first night.

As we now know, that one night turned into eight nights. By the time the flames went out, new oil was ready and new flames were lit. From the moment the small jar of oil was found, the Jews never had to go a day without light again.

The Hanukkah story is about hope and miracles. In the darkness, there can be light. Against all odds, that one pure jug of oil was found. Impossibly, but miraculously, the oil lasted for eight nights. Hanukkah is the only Jewish holiday that centers on night – the time of darkness. We are only permitted to light our menorahs once it is dark outside.

In addition, Hanukkah is celebrated at the darkest time of year – when the days are shortest and the nights are longest. This is because Hanukkah is about times of darkness – times of challenges and difficulties. In that darkness, we light our candles and bring light. We bring a message of hope and
encouragement. No matter how dark things may be, we can still find the light. No matter how impossible things may seem, God can make miracles. “God is my light.”

This Hanukkah, light a candle with us. The flame is small but the light is big. Just one candle can light up an entire room of darkness. So, too, just a bit of faith can light up our darkest hours. Our God is a God of miracles – never give up hope!