

February 8, Epiphany 5A (Matthew 5:13–20)

In those liminal spaces between light's arrival and its incarnation in the face of my child, I prayed.

by [Paul Lutter](#) in the [February 2026](#) issue

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Midafternoon light streams through slitted shades, escapes through my office and bounces off the wall, my desk, my sweater, and the open Bible that sits nearby. I pause to watch the light as it moves, as it slides from everywhere to somewhere to nowhere. This is the light's liturgy in the cold, dark part of the year. I'm not sure where it disappears to from here. All I know is how much I long for its return, to illumine the still spaces, to open my eyes to see what I have otherwise missed

My phone's screen shows a picture of my daughter when she was younger. She's standing in a field full of sunflowers. She wears a yellow dress. A yellow bow is tied in her hair. Her smile is bright and open. Her eyes squint as she looks directly into the sun. She grabbed my phone a week ago, announcing she was going to change the picture on the screen. "I want you and Mom to have the same picture," she said. "That's why you two are married." I don't tell her that we should then use a picture of all three of us. At her age, symmetry rules. In her mind, a picture of her beaming face declares not only the glory of God but the love we share.

As I glance at this picture, I notice how the wind gently blows, how the flowers nod a bit in her direction, and how the sun's rays reflect off her dress, her bow, and her smile. I remember how warm the sun was that day as its rays bounced off the top of my balding head. "You should have worn a hat," I remember her saying. "You're going to get burned." We had applied sunscreen on her arms and nose and legs earlier in the day. We used the last of it on her forehead.

"I guess I'll look like a thermometer then," I said with a laugh.

She laughed, then she protested, "But you're not a thermometer. You're my dad."

Later, as we drove home, I rubbed ice against my warm face. Drops of water spilled from the cubes and onto my shirt. The sun began to dip below the summer's horizon.

"I don't want to sleep right now," she said.

"Even the sun needs sleep," I said, my eyes meeting hers in the rearview mirror. "We'll be home in no time, and then we can play." Her eyelids fought back her body's need to rest. In a few minutes, she was fast asleep.

At a church meeting not long ago, I took my phone and placed it on the table. My daughter's picture lit up whenever I received a call or text or notification. Each time, her face beamed—her eyes half shut, her smile bright and wide—and the sunflowers leaned in to listen.

Someone came into the room and asked if we had seen the sky. The northern lights had come; the sky was painted in pinks, greens, blues, and reds. Soon my screen woke, my daughter's picture appeared, and posts came through with photos of the northern lights. The picture of my daughter came back for a while, then more northern lights photos. Back and forth my screen displayed beauty in all its array.

Each time, I found myself even more grateful for the light, how it had come, and how it had opened my eyes in ways I hadn't imagined. The light shone in the dark room in which we sat. In between, I longed for each picture, each flash of light. I waited for scenes of the painted night sky outside and their conversations with the picture of my daughter. I prayed in those liminal spaces between light's arrival and light's incarnation in the face of my child. I wondered whether the light would return and how it would arrive. I wondered what would be revealed and what it would offer, what sort of invitation to participate in the movement of grace.

As the meeting ended, I gathered my things, locked the building, and walked into the night. The sky's horizon was now dark, lifeless, and a little foreboding. I couldn't find my car, though it was not all that far away. I took out my phone. Using its camera, I saw that the northern lights were still there. I was not alone. I was surrounded by the beauty of creation. In what I saw through the camera's lens, it looked as though love was not merely present. Love had found me, surrounded me, and made a promise of presence, whether I would be aware of it or not.