



Christmas – December 25th, 2020

GOSPEL

John 1:1-14

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. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man but of God.

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.





REFLECTION

'The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it'

(John 1: v. 5)

Christmas still fills me with a sense of wonder and awe. That sense of awe and wonder never seems to go away, no matter how old we get. Do you remember the sense of an anticipation and wonder you had as a child at Christmas? Nothing today ever seems to match the beauty and the glamour and the glitz of childhood presents and love and warmth and care and affection....

Each tree a real tree, decorated with candles, lights and bundles of presents at its feet.

And we seem as adults to constantly compare our present, adult Christmases, with our past Childhood Christmases.

Why, in our dreams, it seems that just as every childhood summer had long, sunny days, with wonderful times by the beach, every childhood Christmas was a white Christmas – deep and crisp and even.

But, of course, our adult experiences are often very different. We lose the awe and the wonder and the joy of Christmas as it becomes a chore... wrapping presents, getting the cards posted in time, cooking the meals, answering the doorbell to a constant stream of visitors, often family members we never see otherwise from one end of the year to another, and so often tipsy while we have to stay sober.

And then there were the sad Christmases: when a child was sick, a job was lost, a loved one died.

But Christmas is always the promise of fresh beginnings, of a new start, of hope returning once again.

Remember how you were filled with awe and wonder on Christmas Morning as a child, year after year. The expectations never faded, even when you knew that there had been times when things went wrong, even when things that went wrong could have robbed you of hope.



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And Christmas is our image of God always being full of promise.

God comes to us in the Christ Child with the promise of fresh beginnings, of a new start, of hope returning once again. God's expectations for us, for the world, never fade, even when he knows that things have gone wrong.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

There is a telling, short sentence at the end of this Gospel reading:

'Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.'

At the heart of the Gospel narrative is the understanding that things aren't always going to work out the way we would like them to. But at the heart of the Gospel story of Christmas is the truth that God is always with us, and that God's expectations for us, God's awe and wonder at being in our presence, should be as much a source of mystery as our awe and wonder being in the presence of God.

When we wrap our presents and gifts in festive colours and decorate our homes and workplaces with lights and tinsel, it is easy to think we have bundled our fears and despair away – at least for the next week or two. Our popular celebrations of Christmas become comfortable and comforting as we sing carols and try to convince ourselves that 'all is calm, all is bright.'

Yet all is not calm in our world, in Europe, in our land or in our economy, nor is all bright for those who are homeless this Christmas, who live in dark fear of poverty or who dread what the future may hold.

All those well-wrapped, warm and homely celebrations are in danger of forgetting that the first Christmas was one filled with fear and dread. Immediately after the birth of the Christ Child in Bethlehem, the scene in Saint Luke's account moves to a hillside where shepherds are working at night, in the dark and in the cold, easy prey to wolves, thieves and the cold weather, less valuable than the animals they tend. And the Gospel writers tell us that those poor shepherds are terrified when they see the angelic host.

The initial task of the angels is to calm those fears. Their first words to those frightened shepherds are not ones of call or command, but words to calm them: **'Fear not.'**



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This Christmas time, when the world is a cold, frightening and uninviting place for many, the first task of the Church must be to bring hope where there is fear, love where there is no peace, to give rather than receive. The angels' call to the shepherds to 'fear not' is not a platitude or an invitation to piety, but one that is linked with the promise of Good News, the promise that God's plans for humanity and for creation are brighter than the darkness of their night. *'Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people'* (Luke 2:10).

But where is there good news for the homeless, the unemployed, the elderly, the parents of vulnerable children?

Where is the hope of great joy for people around the world denied democracy and human rights, for those who live in poverty and under oppression? In his poem 'Christmas', John Betjeman dismisses the commercialisation of Christmas and challenges us to return to the truth of the Christmas message:

***And it is true,
This most tremendous tale of all...
The Maker of the stars and sea
become a Child on earth for me?***

When, in John Betjeman's words, the 'Christmas-morning bells say 'Come!''', we are called not only to hear the story of Christ's birth, the story of a child born to a couple for whom 'there was no place' in Bethlehem, but called too to ensure the words 'Happy Christmas' are not hollow and meaningless.

Amen

