

The Nativity of the Lord – Midnight Mass
(Isaiah 9:1-7 / Titus 2:11-14 / Luke 2:1-14)
24.12.2017

The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone!

As we read those words from the prophet Isaiah, a line from the writings of St Gregory of Nazianzus comes to mind: *On this night once more the darkness is dispersed; once more the light is created ... and what hope this brings us!*

The light of Christ which shines through the darkness of this night heralds a new creation. Just as all began with the creation of light, so all recommences with the coming of Christ *the light of the world*.

Fittingly, our Orthodox brothers and sisters refer to the feast which we celebrate as the *Nativity of Jesus Christ* as the *Genesis of Jesus Christ*. Christmas heralds the hope of a new world!

In Genesis 1 we read: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep...*

Before the coming of light there was emptiness, darkness, confusion. This was a world without welcome, an earth that held no warmth.

Everything changed when God said: *Let there be light*. The world was soon teeming with life.

That does not mean to say that all is light in our world today. There is much shadow at work in today's world, but on this holy night we are invited to look to Christ as our **light in the darkness**.

We sing in a *lucernarium* chant we use here at the monastery – a chant we have employed each week as we have lit the Advent wreath turning to the Lord in prayer: *Come light, light of God, give light to creation, enlighten our hearts and remain with our world*. That chant reminds us how *within our darkest night the Lord kindles a fire that never dies away... for, He is the star of David that shines forth in darkness to enlighten the hearts of all*.

We rejoice that Christ brings us God's light, recognising that at the heart of our calling stands the challenge to reflect this same light to all around us. The call addressed to us is a call to let *our light shine in this darkened world*. As individual believers and as Christian communities we are meant to be beacons of hope in today's world.

Christ brings a light which, the Scriptures remind us, *carries healing in its rays*.

Christ comes with His light to heal our fallen world, our wounded Church, our own fragmented lives, our broken hearts.

So many things can leave us feeling overcast: troubles, worries, concerns can cloud in upon us. Fears for ourselves and/or for others, thwarted ambitions, dashed hopes, our own and others' broken promises, on-going struggles, relational difficulties, addictions of many kinds, losses and grief, divisions of all sorts can weigh us down. All these things are inclined to make themselves felt all the more when everything and everyone around us speaks of coming together, gathering to celebrate and being uplifted – as they do these days.

It is consoling for us to remember that it is precisely into the stark reality of our sometimes pain-ridden lives that the Lord comes to shine His bright, but oh so gentle light: a light that glows warmly and radiates peace.

The titles Isaiah gave to the One we welcome speak to us a word of comfort. It is worth savouring the sense of those titles for a moment.

The prophet tells us the One who comes is our *Wonder-Counsellor*.

The Lord is full of splendid wonder. He is without equal, but, at the same time, in the way He comes to us, He manifests Himself to be so humble and discreet. The wonder of our God is that of a little child in our midst, a vulnerable infant. It is that of One who makes Himself entirely dependent upon others.

Such is the humility of our *Wonderful God* that He chooses to become dependent upon fragile people like you and me to live His life in this world today.

The Lord whose coming we are called to welcome is hailed as our *Counsellor*.

That title speaks of One who helps us make sense out of our lives; One who is there to guide us through those hours of confusion we can all encounter as we make our way through life; One who helps us unravel the mess we can sometimes find ourselves caught up in – let's admit it, a mess we create for ourselves on occasion.

Tonight we dare to call the helpless infant we celebrate our *Mighty God*.

He is not One clothed in the kind of might we are inclined to imagine, the force which we are led to long for, in our foolishness and pride. Our God is One whose strength is revealed in weakness. He clothes Himself in humility and becomes poor for our sakes.

Isaiah speaks of the coming of the *Everlasting Father* in our midst.

He is One who can love us more than any earthly father ever could; One in whose paternal embrace we find a deep, inner peace which brings healing to all those wounded areas of our hearts which result from our multiples disappointments in human love, our deceptions with ourselves and in regard to others.

Isaiah hails the One who comes to be our *Prince of Peace*.

The peace heralded by Christ's coming into the world in the Song of the angels is a peace which Jesus will win for us fully on the cross, a peace that will be fulfilled by His resurrection and left to us as His parting gift: *My peace I give you, my peace I leave with you ... a peace the world cannot give.*

Christ who is the *great light*, *Wonder-Counsellor*, *Mighty God*, *Prince of Peace* comes to us in the nearly total obscurity of a little child born to humble parents in an outhouse of Bethlehem.

He comes to be *God with us* in every situation we could ever encounter in life.

He comes to join us in our distress, our sorrow and our pain. He comes to join us in the humility, the joy and simplicity of love.

God's willingness to enter into our fallen world, darkened by sin; His readiness to do this through the broken, wounded body of the Church of which we are part; His commitment to espouse our personal humanity, with all its flaws ... all this gives us hope and reassurance.

Tonight let us renew our faith in the One who came not only *in the time of the census of Caesar Augustus, when Quirinius was governor of Syria*, but who comes to be with us at this precise moment in time: mid-night Christmas 2017!

Christ's coming will never end.

It is each and every year that the Lord comes anew.

It is each and every day that the Lord recreates us, for, Jesus Christ is not just the child of Bethlehem of over two millennia ago, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*.

It befalls us to give flesh to Christ tonight and to do this over and over again by constantly committing ourselves to live our lives in the light of His gospel.

Let me leave you tonight with a thought of Blessed Oscar Romero –words of exhortation he addressed to his people not long before he was martyred:

Know that you are God's lamp. Light taken from the glowing face of Christ to enlighten human faces, the lives of peoples, the complications and the problems that humans create in their history. Feel obliged to speak, to enlighten like the lamp in the night. Feel compelled to light up the darkness.

Amen!