

25 December 2019 – Christmas Day

I speak to you in the name of He who Is, who Was and who is Yet to come. PBS

Wow! It's finally happened! The Baby has been born! Merry Christmas! Hallelujah!

It's been a long time waiting for this day and yet it's also come in a flash. It seems that just yesterday it was Easter and then September and now Christmas Day!

Our first reading from Isaiah has a wonderful message, "how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" (Isaiah 52.7, NRSV)
For obvious reasons I quite like this message.

We have heard over the past four weeks the stories of Isaiah preparing us for the coming of the Christ Child. Of Emmanuel "God-with-us". Each week we lit a candle for Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, and in preparation and today we lit the Paschal Candle which represents Jesus.

In the days leading up to Christmas Eve I kept hearing "are you ready?" and was asked this question several times. Each time I smiled and said "No." Let me explain. For me, even when the Church is ready, candles out, hymn book marked, lessons prepared and homily written; it is not until the homily is preached and the Eucharist celebrated that I am "ready". Christmas, for me, isn't a singular Day. It is a season. It's not a singular emotion, it is a cluster of them.

For me Christmas is about God's love made manifest on this Day. As wonderful as Christmas Eve services are (and I get to celebrate with three very different services) it is today, Christmas Day that I feel the closest to Christ. Christmas Eve is about preparation, Christmas Day is when the Baby has been born and we rejoice.

It's a quieter time to gather in God's house. To celebrate the birth. To breathe. To bask in the wonder and magnitude of a baby born in the humblest of conditions. To parents who had no support around them. We see our creche and think of what it must have been like that blessed day over 2,000 years ago.

The gospel today is from John. At first glance it seems to be about John the Baptist, as that is who is named. Jesus is referred to as "the Word" and "the light".

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. (John 1.1-5, NRSV)

It's a beautiful image...light shining in the darkness. I have a secret to share with you...I'm afraid of the dark. I'm 52 years old and I sleep with a nightlight in my room. A couple of years ago I took a friend to the mine in Bellevue, have any of you ever taken it or another underground tour?

We got rigged up, put on the helmets and headlamps and I felt myself beginning to shake. We walked into the mine and after only a few minutes of walking I could no longer see the entrance to the tunnel. It was dark. We got to the end of the tunnel and the guide instructed us to turn off our headlamps. I nervously did so and immediately stopped breathing. I was terrified.

In a couple of minutes she instructed us to turn the headlamps back on. And I was hyperventilating. A few of the folks in the group laughed at me, which was fine, although kind of rude in my humble opinion. I was terrified and it took a couple of hours for my heart rate to come back down. Would I take that tour again? Likely, yes. Will I still be afraid? Absolutely.

A single candle in a dark room can provide enough light to see around you. Two candles together multiply the lightedness.

Knowing God is similar to that. Without God we are in a pitch black pit. When we reject God we enter darkness that has no beginning and no ending.

When we reach out for God, a single candle is illuminated in the darkness. It may not be as bright as mid-day, yet it is enough to provide comfort; even to those who are afraid of the dark.

When Jesus was stepping into his earthly ministry he was not greatly accepted in his hometown of Nazareth. He was seen as Joseph and Mary's kid. It was difficult for those who had known him a long time to accept him as an adult. Scripture says "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." (John 1.11-14, NRSV)

It took some time, eventually most people got there. They realised that Joe the Carpenter's kid was someone special. They may not have known immediately that he was the Messiah, yet eventually they got there.

Jesus is about mercy. Emmanuel means God-with-us. And that's exactly who Jesus was. He was sent with love, from God to walk among us. And when we accept Jesus into ourselves we become Children of God. Children, not of perfection, yet of earth. Children in the sense of innocence and joy. To see with the eyes of the innocent children. To love with the heart of Mary. To step out in faith with the courage of the shepherds. That is who we are called to be.

So as we walk through the last few days of 2019, may we remember that we ARE blessed children of God. And everyone we encounter is also God's blessed child.

Our responsibility is to give thanks for the incredible gift we have been given: the gift of Jesus. While we await his return we continue His ministry to love and serve. To seek Christ in the face of the stranger and friend alike. To talk with the feet of messengers announcing that Christ lives among us; not in flesh, yet in hope, faith, joy and love.

Merry Christmas! Hallelujah!

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Isaiah 52.7-10
Psalm 98
Hebrews 1.1-12
John 1.1-14