

Christmas Midnight 2015 St Martin's Eynsford, John 1:1-14

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

"Dashing through the snow, in a one horse open sleigh...", "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas..." For weeks we have been bombarded by songs in the shops, on the TV and the radio, that present us with a sentimental view of Christmas, a world covered with a dusting of white snow where everyone has everything they want.

But we are all too aware that our world isn't like that. There will be many here tonight who will have experienced times of darkness in their personal lives; the loss of loved ones, financial difficulties perhaps because of the loss of employment or because of illness. Over the past few weeks we have all seen and heard of the terrible attacks in Paris, the continuing horror of fighting across the Middle East, the deaths of so many refugees as they put to sea in overloaded boats to escape that horror. We do truly live in the "land of deep darkness" described by the prophet Isaiah.

As we gather here tonight, there is a lot of darkness in our world. But we also gather as a hopeful people. And our hope is rooted in a promise that God made many years ago. The prophet Isaiah tells us, about 700 years before Jesus was born:

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus Christ entered into this world to bring us peace. That is why I find myself so drawn to the beginning of John's gospel every Christmas. In verse 5 we read, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." The Christmas story isn't only about angels, shepherds, donkeys, camels, wise men, stars or any of the rest. The Christmas story is summed up in those magnificent words from St John, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

If you've ever been to the theatre, you'll understand the image. Before the play starts, everything is dark, then on comes a spotlight, and a small pool of light bursts forth on the stage. The darkness is still there, all around, but the light shines in the darkness, and piece by piece all is revealed, made clear. Jesus is the

spotlight shining in the darkness of our world, shedding light in the dark places of pain, of suffering, of hurt, of violence. Sometimes the light brings healing, sometimes comfort, sometimes revelation, sometimes challenge, but always peace. When the light of Jesus shines in our hearts, all fear is banished by the peace of the prince of peace.

In verse 14 we read, “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.” When Moses met God on Mount Sinai, he was veiled – and for thousands of years the Shekinah, the glory of God, was veiled, until that day when the Word was made flesh. In Jesus we see the true glory of God unveiled, revealed.

When we look at the land of deep darkness, often we can be prompted to ask the question – does God not care?

Of course God cares – that is why he came, to let the light shine in the darkness. Jesus, the Christ-child, is the light shining into our darkness, and illuminating it with the light of hope, peace, love and joy. In John 3 verse 16, we read, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.’

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son - we see God revealed in every painful situation in life.

Sometimes, this world gives us no cause for hope, yet the Christ-child comes in the midst of chaos and destruction and we hear again the gospel message; a message of ‘joy, love and peace’. For some of us, this may have been a very difficult year, far from peaceful, full of hurt and pain; as we look around our world, we may be forgiven for thinking that peace will never come. But God’s light of love does shine in the darkness of these situations, sometimes in the miraculous but also in the ordinary.

Those people who work with aid agencies; risking their lives, giving their time and their gifts to help; that is the light of God’s love shining in the darkness. In our daily lives the light of God’s love also shines in the darkness. When we help those who are less fortunate than ourselves, the light of God’s love shines in the darkness. When we accompany a grieving friend giving them comfort, this is where the light of God’s love shines in the darkness. When we keep a check on our elderly neighbour to make sure they are ok, that is where the light of God’s

love shines in the darkness. We can help the light of God's love shine in the darkness in the very ordinariness of our daily lives.

The birth of Jesus is God's astonishing answer to all the things that would try to destroy love and hope, peace and justice, human dignity and joy – that would try to convince us that God is far away and that we live in darkness. These scriptures tell us to have faith, hope and love, even if the world seems to give us little cause to have a positive view of life.

The Gospels announce the arrival of the true king of peace. Christ brings a peace that no earthly king will ever achieve. This Christmas Eve Gospel shows us the true king of peace, who enters our lives, even if we have come to church this night with pain in our hearts. Christ brings peace this night especially to those with broken hearts and the light of God's love shines in our darkness. God sends us peace in the birth of his Son – that peace which passes all our understanding.

This Christmas may we all see and know anew how great God's love is toward each one of us and may we see the light of that love breaking through the darkness of our own lives, the lives of others and in our broken world.

Let us pray: Father of all, you have declared your love to all peoples by the birth of the holy Child at Bethlehem: help us to welcome him with gladness and make room for him in our daily lives; so that we may live at peace with you and in goodwill with all; and may we bring the light of God's love into the dark places of our world; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.