

Christmas Day
Year A - December 25th, 2019 - 8am & 9.30am

Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm 98
Hebrews 1:1-4
John 1:1-14

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1: 1&5

These beautiful and evocative words from John that we have just heard in our Gospel passage will be read in many other churches around the country and indeed the world this Christmas morning. Families and friends and strangers will stand together in silence to listen to these words that proclaim the length and breadth and depth of God’s desire to love the world.

While the other Gospel writers tell an earthly story of a peasant couple, an infant, an innkeeper, shepherds and kings, John begins his story in the heavenly realm with God and God’s Word, reminding those who are listening (us) that ultimately this is God’s world. No matter how dark it is outside there is a Light that wants to burst through the darkness and shine for all the world to see and the darkness will never overcome it.

The vision we are given in John’s gospel is **not** a vision for ourselves alone, not something to hold onto, but a framework for us to use so that we might also be ‘the light of the world’ and to let that light ‘shine before others’.

This metaphor of light is one of the strongest themes across all of the Gospels, and Jesus situates himself as the light and encourages his followers to also shine forth. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that we should ‘shine’; but also that we should ‘rejoice’ and ‘be glad’ (Mt. 5.12).

It's fair to say that this is not always easy in the world as we see it today - it is challenging for us to do any of that - to rejoice, to be glad, or to be the light. And yet this is one of the great gifts of Christmas; that we are given this opportunity reflect again on the blessed birth of Christ and be strengthened in our resolve to live lives of joy and light.

In this season of joy and gladness we Christians are called to do what the Jews refer to as "Tikkun Olam" - the repair of the world. A 17th century midrash (a story about a story in the Bible) explains it this way.

In the beginning, it says, when the creator of the universe made the world, he set in place vessels into which he poured his divine light. But the light was too brilliant for the frail vessels which, unable to contain the light, shattered all over the universe.

Ever since then, the myth continues, the task of human beings has been to go about God's universe mending and transforming the broken vessels so that they can once again be receptacles of God's divine light. But while everyone is called to repair the world, it is only the faithful who can do it, for it they alone know the purposes of the Creator.

The vision of the Creator is that the whole earth will, as St. Paul says, "be set free from decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8.21). Paul tells us that creation is eagerly awaiting this new time. How we get there is the ministry of all believers, and it embraces all people, all of creation. In a world that is fragmented, alienated and polarised, in a world caught in a spiral of destruction through violence, wars and environmental disasters the need to repair the world is greater than ever before.

But it can only be done by the faithful - you, me - who listen intently to the voice of God and obey it. As we anticipate the Word becoming flesh and living among us, and begin a new year, I invite you to join with me in being vessels of God's divine light, making 'Tikkun Olam' our calling in this time and place.

In his Christmas message this year, Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States says that he thinks it's no surprise, nor was it an accident that long ago, followers of Jesus began to commemorate his birth, his coming into the world, at a time when the world seemed at its darkest.

So, we too are called to celebrate and commemorate his coming, when things do not always look right in this world.

With our feet firmly planted on earth let us practice 'Tikkun Olam' and be the light as we come alongside someone - even if it is for just a moment. A word of hope and encouragement, a smile or gentle touch, a prayer is God's language of love which will surely be enough to banish the darkness and let the Light of Christ enter.

Even in the darkest night, the light of Christ was born - it shone, and will shine still. His way of love is the way of life. It is the light of the world. And the light of that love shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not, cannot, and will not overcome it.

To you, and to your families and your loved ones I extend the blessing of the Word made Flesh - may Christ be born anew in you, and his light guide you in your lives ahead.

In the name of God. Amen