

CHRISTMAS EVE – (Homily 03 Year C)

“Light For Our Darkness ”

(Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-16)

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Fr. Rene Fumoleau in the NWT recounts a trip with an elder by car in the north when an elder compared believing in God to driving a car at night. One sets out to a destination unable to see further than the distance illuminated by the headlights of the vehicle. That inability to see far does not hamper the journey because the light of the headlamps goes ahead of the vehicle, allows one to proceed in the darkness all the way to the destination. The elder mentioned that faith in God gives us just enough light to live another day.

The birth of Jesus into our world over two thousand years ago is similar to that story. Jesus brought light into our darkness, redeemed us from the power of that darkness, and transforms us into children of light for the world.

In the familiar and beautiful prophecy from Isaiah, we hear a succinct reference to a people that walked in darkness and lived in the shadow of deep darkness. He could have been speaking of our time. Our darkness today takes the form of war, corruption and greed in governments and financial institutions as well as our own families and communities, abuse of all kinds including sexual abuse, human trafficking of women and children, rape, gang violence and family breakdown, racism and discrimination, rampant addictions including pornography, and a rash of suicides and attempted suicides by young people. The list could go on. Needless to say, we also walk in darkness and live in the shadow of deep darkness.

Isaiah, however, also prophecies good news: A child will be born among us who is *Wonderful Counsellor, Almighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace*. He will lift the yoke and the bar of darkness and evil, and break the rod of oppressive forces and systems. He will uphold justice, establish the kingdom of David and bring joy and hope to all.

Isaiah’s prophecy reminds me of Dr. Martin Luther King who inspired thousands of people and indeed changed a nation and the world with his famous oration in the capital city of the United States entitled *I Have A Dream*. That dream, as powerful as it was, pales compared to the dream that

God has for us and shares with us in the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, among us.

In the Gospel, we hear once again that familiar story of what we know and believe is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah in the birth of Jesus. The most striking note of this prophetic fulfillment, this birth, is the humble setting. Instead of Caesar, court, officials, Jerusalem and emperor, we have the child Jesus, shepherds, angels, Joseph and Mary. Instead of royal robes and thrones, we have a swaddling cloth and a manger, foreshadowing the burial cloth and the cross, his destiny of sacrificial death on our behalf.

The New Interpreters Bible offers an interesting reflection on this event. At Bethlehem we witness the scandal that God came into human history completely helpless, as a newborn. He could have come in power and glory, but instead slipped almost unnoticed into a small province in a forgotten corner of the world to a poor young couple, unwed or only recently married. There were no elaborate preparations for this birth – God was born on the road. The crib was a feeding trough, and those who came to visit were shepherds, not kings. By entering human history in this way, God identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor and the homeless. Among them, God could do divine work. A humility born of need is the prerequisite for entry into this new kingdom.

The NIB continues to recount that the Christmas story tells the birth of a new king. Though the world was ruled by Caesar Augustus who was known as a peacemaker, real peace on earth would be realized only through the sovereignty of the child born in Bethlehem. The birth reveals a new world order, a world not under Caesar but under the direction of God's design for the redemption of all peoples. In this world, God's Word is heard by the humble. There is a place even for shepherds. There is hope for the poor and the oppressed, and those who heard what God was doing were filled with joy. God has not forgotten us nor abandoned us in the brokenness that we have created for ourselves. The story of Christmas is, therefore, *both an announcement of hope, and a call to deep humility.*

The second reading from Paul to Titus, unfolds for us the way that God worked through Jesus Christ and the impact this was meant to have on our lives. Paul is very clear: *He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.* Redeem and purify. Those are the key words.

Jesus came into our wounded and broken world with a two-fold mission: to redeem or save, and to sanctify or make whole. It was not enough just to forgive us; he would also heal us.

The image that I like to use to understand this mystery more deeply is an experience I had as a university student when I slid far into a ditch in the winter snow with my car. I had to get a truck to pull me out, to redeem me and save me from the ditch. Next, before I could start the car, I had to open the hood and remove all the snow packed around the motor, steering mechanism and fan belt especially. The car needed to be sanctified, purified, made road worthy. Then and only then was I able to drive away to my destination.

That is what God has done for us in Jesus whom he sent as redeemer and sanctifier, as savior and Lord. As Paul put it in the second reading, our response must now be to let go of impiety and passions and live lives of self control, uprightness, godliness, zealous for good deeds and loving service, waiting in hope and expectation.

Two questions that we can ask ourselves today are: 1) What ditch am I in, or am I getting out of? And 2) What shape am I in as I emerge from this ditch? In other words, from what do I still need to be redeemed, and where do I still need healing in my life?

St. Paul would insist the time is now - there is no need to wait any longer. We must let Jesus be our savior and our Lord, and surrender our lives to him.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a participation in that two-fold mission of Jesus. As we ponder the Word of God and receive the Body of Jesus, we are forgiven and sanctified, and sent out to bring the world the light of Christ.

So let us respond, on this dark winter night, to the call to believe, be forgiven and healed, and be a light to the world.