



Wednesday 25th December 2024

Christmas Day

Gospel Reading

John 1.1-14

The Word Became Flesh

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ 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.

Other Readings: Isaiah 52.7-10 Psalm 98 Hebrews 1.1-4[5-12]

Homily: The Christmas tree

I wonder how long you have had your Christmas tree up? A house is transformed once the tree is up and decorated. Whether it is real or a good fake, with tacky or tasteful decorations, it signals that Christmas has come.

Christmas has come and I want to spend a few moments contemplating the Christmas Tree to help us know more deeply why we celebrate Christmas.

I love the look and smell of a real tree. We've lost the leaves of all the other trees, of course. They are now bleak and bare and stark to look at. We know winter is part of nature's cycle, but we long for life and growth, for hope in the darkness. The **evergreen Christmas tree** shows us life in the darkest part of the year. Evergreen - like God's love for humanity, is always present even when life is bleak. Life was bleak 2000 years ago - a birth in a stable because there was no room, the little family fleeing for their lives to Egypt. What would become of them? – What will become of us this next year, our nation, our world?

So look at the tree and remember that God, like an evergreen, is always present. The tree is a witness to life, to God bringing about new possibilities and opportunities for peace, for reconciliation for creativity. It doesn't change the fact that it is still winter, but this tree tells us life continues, God still brings about life, even if there seems to be no room for it.

As a child I used to sit in a corner in our living room with only **the twinkling tree lights** just watching them go on and off. Christmas trees always have lights, often twinkly ones. In the darkness of winter, be it in nature, our nation or our hearts, we have to find the lights, turn on the lights and notice their patterns. Perhaps we bought new lights this year, perhaps we rummaged around in the back of the cupboard to dust off the old ones.

The wise men and the shepherds all saw light – the light of the star, the dazzling light of an angelic host. They decided to follow where the light pointed. The lights on the tree remind us that the light will come whether we take part in it or not. Christmas invites us to play our part, to live in and by the light of Christ.

The lights on the tree also remind us that now there is more light than there was before. Christmas Day comes just after the winter solstice, the darkest days of the year - we have gone beyond the tipping point, there is now more light each day, we can just about see that. Just like the twinkling lights need darkness for there to be a flash of light so we live by the light of Christ though there is darkness in the world, and it makes a difference. The birth of this baby makes a difference, if we welcome him.

I wonder what you have at the **top of your tree**. Perhaps a star - that light the wise men followed until it showed them where the light of the world lay. Sometimes there's a bit of a debate about whether it's **a fairy or an angel** on top. Fairies have magic wands and cast spells.

Christmas trees, for the record, have angels. Angels are beings of light and messengers of God and there are a lot of them in the Christmas story appearing to Mary, to Shepherds, in dreams, often singing, always bringing a message from God which includes the words 'Fear not'. Angels don't cast spells, they reassure and unsettle us, and they invite us to be part of God's plan. It's altogether more gentle, invitational though often terrifying.

Sometimes we hear about Christmas being magical. Christians don't believe in magic – we go for wonder, awe, mystery and invitation. You can't cast a spell and conjure God. All humanity is invited to wonder at this divine birth – wise, poor, humble, the disbelieving and those full of faith. We wonder at the message of peace and hope brought about by angels, some divine, some human, who ask us to come and worship, come and welcome him, play our part.

For Christians Christmas is neither a magical time nor a lovely idea. Christmas celebrates the reality of the incarnation - the word, God, made flesh. We need more than optimism and ideas to face the darkness. Christians are not optimistic they are hopeful, living by light, even in darkness and always alert to the light within our world and within people.

Look and allow yourself to wonder at the tree, to find hope in the mystery of light shining in darkness.

Look at the Christmas tree and know that God's love is steadfast, just as the evergreen is ever green.

Look at the lights and know that God brings light in darkness through the gift of his Son Jesus, in the most unexpected ways, like the twinkly lights.

Look up for the angel, respond to the invitation to fear not, to journey in Christ's light revealed in a new human life, fragile yet divine, a light for all.

Conversation Questions

1. John 1 reveals Jesus as the true light coming into the world. Where do we see light in this and in the nativity passages?
2. How might we bear witness to and live by light and hope?
3. What inspiration might looking at the Christmas tree give you?
4. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
5. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Lord Jesus Christ,
your birth at Bethlehem
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:
accept our heartfelt praise
as we worship you,
our Saviour and our eternal God.

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