

John 1:1-14 - Welcoming Christ – the light Midnight Mass 2023

This passage from John's Gospel is well known as it is read and preached on every Christmas, but that being the case, there is always the risk that in its familiarity, the value of the message can be lost.

This evening as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, I want to pick up on verse 5:

“ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Having just endured the shortest day of the year, and seemingly weeks of continuous dull days and rain, we have become used to the darkness over the past months. Everything to do with nature seems to be dormant, leaves cover the ground and our gardens look soggy, abandoned and sad, yet here we are in the darkness of midnight to celebrate the Christian Feast of Christmas. The birth of Jesus, the one true light is celebrated at the darkest time of year, and this renews our hope in the future because **light will always dispel darkness.**

Jesus is the light that darkness cannot overcome, and he has arrived as Isaiah prophesied:

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shone! (Is. 9.2).

Sometimes it can be difficult for us to accept that because in life, there is always a struggle between darkness and light. We experience that on a personal level regularly, especially when illness comes or we plough our way through grief following the death of someone we love. We all certainly experience dark moments whenever we watch the news. Nowhere is that more graphically seen than in the unwarranted war in Ukraine over the past 18 months, or in the destruction of Jesus' own homeland at the moment. The conflict being waged in Gaza following the unprovoked attack by Hamas fighters on October 7th and the subsequent response by Israel is almost too unbearable to watch. Bombs, destruction and terror seem to be the only language being used, yet we have to watch, hope and pray that people do indeed get together to talk peace, or at least show the inclination to do so, but still we wait. As with all wars, it's not only the military who suffer, that would be bad enough, it is also the innocent. Who could not be horrified by what we see on the news, the displaced people, children whose young minds may be scarred for life, homes, schools and hospitals destroyed and utter despair on the faces of those caught in the middle. Humankind has a great propensity for inflicting darkness on each other when God's message is simple: love one another as I have loved you.

The world is in flux, yet we live in peace, apart from those with so little to worry about that they think saving themselves a few seconds by cutting me up in the queue to park my car on the Saturday before Christmas is more important than **anything** – God love their self-centred shallow minds, because I didn't !

If we look back over history, the world, with its sheer magnitude, has always been either magnificent or horrendous, usually both at the same time and we know that there have been times when the horrors of war have not escaped us, people have always been on the move if not always by choice.

If there is poverty in one land, people look to another – as my parents did with three very young children, when they left their home in Dublin to come to England to find work. Where there is violence, people look for a safe haven, we see every day in the news. People putting their lives at risk to cross borders and seas in order to find better lives. Surely, we cannot blame them; and if we do blame them, we should remember the world does not belong to us and ask ourselves the question, “what makes us so special”?

Even the story of the birth of Jesus shows us a family on the move trying to survive in their darkest hour, travelling for hundreds of miles on one man’s order to complete a census. Mary’s baby was due at any moment and with no hospitality available, Joseph took to pleading with an innkeeper who gave them the floor of his animal shelter for the child to be born on and a cattle feeding trough for him to sleep in.

BUT AT LEAST HE GAVE SOMETHING to bring light into their darkness!

What can we give to help the world? And don’t say, “I can do nothing”.

We can give our prayers, we can give our money and as some people did at the start of the Ukraine conflict, we can give our homes to those who have travelled many miles to offer shelter and security, for which the recipients will be eternally grateful. We can speak out against the despots and dictators of this world who will face God’s judgement one day, as we all will, and I wouldn’t want to be in their shoes.

As Christians, living in a country that becomes more secular by the day, it is more important than ever that we stand up for peace on earth, and we can begin in our own homes, lives and neighbourhoods. Let God work through you to bring light into this dark world. Whatever good deed you can do for someone suffering from the effects of war, homelessness or poverty, whether they be a refugee or someone like yourself who just happens to be going through a troubled time; do it and you will bring light of Christ into their darkness and be an instrument of healing in their life. That is the message of Christmas.

No action is too small! – Just ask the Innkeeper.

Finally, some words from Matthew Guite an English Anglican Priest, poet and song writer, a poem written about the birth of Jesus and the challenges he and his family will face at the hands of others.

Refugee.

We think of him as safe beneath the steeple,
Or cosy in a crib beside the font,
But he is with a million displaced people
On the long road of weariness and want.

For even as we sing our final carol
His family is up and, on that road,
Fleeing the wrath of someone else's quarrel,
Glancing behind and shouldering their load.

Whilst Herod rages still from his dark tower
Christ clings to Mary, fingers tightly curled,
The lambs are slaughtered by the men of power,
And death squads spread their curse across the world.
But every Herod dies, and comes alone
To stand before the Lamb upon the throne.

I wish you a Holy and Blessed Christmas.