St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

Christmas Day

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

John 1: 1-1

Light in the Darkness

About 16 billion years or so ago, farther back than my mind can conceive, there came out of infinity a new place for life created by God. Slowly, the life emerged on God’s time about which we have no understanding. And, as life emerged out of the chaos of creation, mankind showed itself at home in the garden, co-existing with it in harmony and grateful thanks. There was no war or violence, no envy or hatred, no darkness or death, only peace, light and contentment.

Adam and Eve were beautiful in their innocence until they were compelled to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which was forbidden to them by God, and we are still trying to figure out how to fix that mistake. We still turn away from God’s will in order to satisfy false idols with our worship.

But God is not willing to let us go that easily. Everything that exists comes from God, there is nothing that is not created by God and there is nowhere one can be where God is not. We are never out of God’s presence and there is nothing that is not a sign of God’s love.

To turn away from God, then, is to willingly move into nothingness…to darkness of our own making.

The very human stories handed down over the ages since the time of Adam and Eve….stories of violence, greed, and all the rest of he darker side of humankind, deepen this reality of our choices.

We have heard the voices of the prophets warning us against our stupidity calling us to repent and return to God’s way, but we are poor learners and we continued to live according to our own desires.

Then, the time came for God to have had enough, And now there was time before Christ, and time after Christ. AD and BC. For a fleeting moment time stopped and everything changed, because after millions of years of human deafness, God came to be among us, born in the most unlikely place, to the most unlikely parents in a town that was just a dot on the map, so that we could not only hear God’s voice, but see and touch God. And all of heaven and earth: angels and humankind alike, held a collective breath as human history was changed forever.

The Light had come into the world,

God the Son incarnate. Immortal, invisible, God with a human face, hands and fee,t as one of us. After all those years, since the time of creation, we would not listen to God, so God came to us.

God came not to admonish but to bring us to him and to unite his nature with ours: Human and Divine, manifested in one living example, Jesus Christ. And that is why we call him Savior.

Through him we are freed to love, freed to find peace, freed to choose God over evil, freed to choose life over death.

It is the meaning of Christmas. It is God’s gift to God’s own creation,

Fast forward to 2000 years later, to the memory of that night in Bethlehem. Whoever we are, wherever we are, we cannot help but feel the light shining into the darkness again, the way it always has and always will, and somehow we sense, that no matter what happens in the world, the world will not win.

It was that way in the beginning, and it is that way now, and God knows we are going through some dark days. Somehow each day brings more darkness, and yet as this season of light teaches us, we don’t have to succumb to any kind of darkness.

We have all experienced loss….of loved ones, of time for rest. Living through the pandemic, we experience loss of tradition, like freely visiting loved ones without fear of contaminating them or the other way around. It feels odd to sanitize oneself against the ones we love. We grieve that our best laid plans to mingle with loved ones and friends are thwarted yet again, as the Omicron variant makes its rounds with devastating speed. We worry about our planet, is it too late to save it. These and all manner of other anxieties that are the darkness and, perhaps most of all, we wonder if the light will be strong enough to combat all the darkness.

We think of Christmas as the perfect antidote for our darkness, but we have burdened it with worldly expectations. We want it to be perfect. We want it to look and sound like the Christmas songs and carols we sing. Like Christmas cards. Perfect. All the parts must be in place….all the decorations, the tree, the food, the gifts, the usual family issues gone and in their place, congeniality and unmistakable love. We want snow, but not so much that we cannot go where we want, when we want. But we do like things to look like Christmas, so a little snow is perfect.

But hands up, friends, if you’ve ever known a Christmas to be perfect! And here’s the good news, At the time of the year when we find ourselves worshiping our Savior, wrapped in rough cloths, in a stable lying in the manger that is usually reserved for feeding the cows, we are shown that from the first Christmas night in Bethlehem, it was anything but perfect, and yet we, along with a good part of the world are still celebrating that day!

If you think about that, it’s easier to let go of the need for perfection at Christmas today. I’m not too sure how quiet it was, what with angels proclaiming, shepherds shouting, not to mention animals everywhere. There’s a lot about animals we don’t mention when we retrace our steps through the nativity story. Animals are earthy and are not easy to imagine as serene. I can imagine the racket the dogs were making with all these strangers showing up!

So, no. It wasn’t perfect and it probably wasn’t too comfortable or quiet. It was a holy mess. It was as God found us, as we were and are.

It was where God chose to enter into our world. A world that needed to understand the power of humility and how to put our priorities in the correct order. Jesus was teaching us from the beginning, because he was there at the beginning of time itself.

We will continue to endure our losses and conflicts, or plans gone awry, but we can find strength in knowing that Mary never thought she would be giving birth to this very special child in a stable under such excruciating circumstances. But she did, little knowing that her ordeal was only just beginning.

We are just like Mary. In the midst of our darkness, we don’t know what to expect. We have no way of knowing what darkness will try to penetrate our bodies and souls. Yet, whatever it may be, when nothing seems to be going our way, Christ is always with us because he was with us from the beginning of God’s time, in God’s present and God’s future. Christ came among us at a time we call Christmas, yet Christ was with us before and ever since.

There has never been a Christmas without Christ, and there never will be a Christmas without Christ…not during a pandemic lockdown, not during travel restrictions, or snows that close churches, nor in the midst of natural disasters, or war, there has never been a Christmas without Christ. No matter what, the more chaotic the world seems, the more we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the more we give thanks for his presence.

And here we are again. Christmas came regardless of Omicrom, regardless of snow warnings, regardless of our doubts. Christmas came. The Light that enlightened the world has come again to banish all our darkness; to chase away our doubts and there is nothing we have done, or will do that will stop the coming of Christ among us.

It is why our prayer of thanks reveals itself in the lights that glow from within and outside out homes, and why we know that, on this day of remembrance of Christ’s coming, God’s love, from the beginning of time, today and into a future none of us can comprehend, really does conquer all.

Amen.

Written to the Glory of God

E.J. R. Culver+

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