

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Jn 1:6-8, 19-28)

(At 5:30pm mass only: "Star light, star bright. First star I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish I might, make this wish come true tonight.")

Christmas is coming! Christmas is coming! Those words bring joy and excitement to children all around the world as they dream of the wonderful things which Christmas will bring. That hope is brought about not by the promise of all kinds of new toys but by the coming birth of a little child who will be called Jesus. Just as our eyes are drawn to a single star in a darkening sky, so too are our spirits drawn to the light of this child who came into our world 2,000 years ago. The wonder of it all is that God, the Almighty, our Creator became one of us. It's almost more than the human mind can understand, and so we call it "mystery." But bring a child to the manger scene and they don't need to understand; their little hearts know that something real, something special is happening. The Christmas story captures our imagination like no other story because it brings light into our lives, it brings hope into the darkness of our world.

Our eyes are drawn to the light of the stars in the sky because of the darkness surrounding them. We think of the sun as being so bright that it is blinding, but in the vastness of our solar system the sun is only a tiny dot of light in the vast darkness of space. When we say that Jesus is the "light of the world" we are talking about how he shines bright spiritually in the midst of the darkness of our world. Amidst all of the sin of the world, he stands out as a beacon of holiness; amidst all of the violence which people inflict on one another, he shines as the light of non-violence and peace; amidst the darkness of greed and lust for power, he shines brightly as a model of meekness and humility while remaining strong. And we are drawn to his light, to his holiness, to his love for every person. Our eyes need light to see; our souls need light to be the child of God we are created to be in the midst of a sinful, human world. "Christmas is coming," John the Baptist proclaims to the people of his time. He doesn't say it in exactly those words; instead he talks of one who is so much greater than he is that he is not even worthy to untie his sandal straps. The Jewish people have been waiting hundreds of years for the Messiah. In their darkness they were longing for the light promised by their prophets. So, John comes, and he tells them, "Christmas is coming."

Huh? What's Christmas? They don't understand because they are looking for a traditional king/savior/messiah. They have lost the ability to see with the eyes of faith, and therefore Jesus comes among them, walks

with them, teaches them, shines his light upon them, and they do not recognize him.

In many ways **we** are in the same boat. We hear “Christmas is coming,” and we go shopping. We decorate our houses and our yards with bright lights and put snowmen and Santa Claus and reindeer on our rooftops and overlook “Christ” in Christmas. We throw lavish parties with lots to eat and drink while much of the world is starving. And the irony escapes us that what we are celebrating is the birth of a baby in a stable --- actually, let’s call it what it really was, a barn to house animals. We have heard the term “stable” so often that we tend to think of it as being equivalent to a modern-day hospital room, when it was really a dirty, smelly, unkempt, dark, drafty, structure. Into this **barn** God entered into our world as one of us. And a star shone brightly in the dark night sky to tell the world that God is with us in every circumstance of our lives. He **had** to be born lowly so that we would know that God loves each and every one of us, no matter how poor or sick or destitute or contemptible in the eyes of others we are. God loves us! Christmas is coming!

God loves us! Shout it from the roof tops for there is no greater news than this. God is **not** someone whom we need to **fear** because God loves us. God is **not** someone whose favor we have to win by doing all kinds of good things; **God loves us** no matter what. The good things we do because we know that simple fact, God loves me, and because He does, I do. And light shines in our darkness when we love.

We are called to be “light to the world.” At our baptism, we or our parents were given a candle lit from the Easter Candle and were told, “Receive the light of Christ.” Our very presence is a light to others. This year I’ve noticed that there aren’t as many houses decorated with Christmas lights. Maybe it’s the economy; I know that we have cut back on our spending this year. But a couple of Saturdays ago 3 young adults came over to our house and helped us decorate our Christmas tree. They brought their love and their laughter, the “light” of their presence into our home. And our tree shines brighter this year, our home is warmer because of their light which illumines our hearts. And we thank God for His love shone to us through those 3 angels.

We don’t need to give gifts to others for them to know love --- our very presence in love to them is the greatest gift of all. That’s what God gave to us, His presence in love as one of us in the form of a tiny baby. The Light of the World, represented by the Christmas star, has been handed on to us. We are the light of the world now. May our light shine before all that they will see the good that we do and give glory to God.

Some friends of ours told us of the best Christmas they have ever had. The mother said to the kids, who were all teenagers, "This year we're going to do something different for Christmas." Their normal tradition was to get up at the crack of dawn and open their presents in their pajamas. But she said, "This year we're going to get up at the crack of dawn and go to the Homeless Shelter and help them serve breakfast. Then we're going to church, and then we will come home and change back into our pajamas and open our presents." You can imagine the protests that she heard, but she simply said, "Trust me in this." So they did exactly as she had said. They served breakfast, not only to homeless men and women, but to whole families with little kids. After breakfast the little children were led into a room where they got to pick out one toy for themselves. Then they went to church, and then back home to change into their pajamas and open their presents. And this family says that it was the best Christmas they have ever had.

Someone is lonely this year because their family has forgotten them in a care facility; with your presence, be the light of Christ to them. Someone is grieving during this holiday season because of the death of someone they love; with your ears to listen to their memories, be the light of Christ to them. Someone is shivering in the cold and homeless; with the warmth of your heart, be the light of Christ to them. Some family is hurting at this time because a brother or sister, son or daughter is in prison; with your goodness, be light to them in their darkness. A family is split apart by separation or divorce; with your love, bring the light of Christ into their lives.

Yes, Christmas is coming. Take the light of Christ which burns inside of you into the darkness of our world and brighten someone else's life.

Deacon Mike Richard
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