

Christmas Eve – Midnight Mass

John 1:1-14

Isaiah 52:7-10; Heb 1:1-12

The idea of decorating the front of one's house at this time of year – 'house bling', as it's called – is becoming more and more popular. In some cases, it's become rather competitive, as folk try to make their displays brighter and more colourful and varied than anyone else's in the neighbourhood. And, of course, it's always thrilling to see these wonderful illuminations brightening up the darkness of winter.

Now this idea of light in the midst of darkness is a very appropriate image for what lies at the heart of the message of Christmas. We live in a world which is full of darkness – not darkness in a literal sense – but the darkness of evil. We see the consequences of evil all around us in the world today in the form of wars, terrorist attacks, corruption, injustice, poverty...; we witness unrest and discord in our communities; and above all, we experience the effects of evil in our *own* lives in the form of the

sinful words, actions, thoughts and attitudes which beset us each day. We need someone to save us from all of this mess. And so, at this time, we're reminded once again of the good news that God has indeed sent us such a Saviour. Because Jesus comes as "the light [who] shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." In the end, evil will *not* have the last word.

In those majestic words we've just heard from the beginning of the Gospel according to John, we get to the very heart of the real *life-changing* message of Christmas. Because here the truth is declared that Jesus, born for us at Christmas, is *no* ordinary person. In Jesus Christ, the eternal God himself – the Word (as John puts it), the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, came to dwell among us. God has made himself known to us in the historical person of Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human. As our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, "He *is* the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's *very being*...." – in other words, when we see *Jesus*, we see *God*. In fact, when John talks about

God becoming human and living among us, he uses a rather down-to-earth word in the original language which literally means 'to pitch one's tent' – it's about God 'pitching his tent' among us for a while. God is *not* distant from us, but in Jesus Christ he comes to share in our humanity, to identify with us in our situation – to share in our joys and our sorrows, in our sufferings and our trials. In fact, being in the presence of Jesus had such an impact upon his early followers that John could boldly declare, "We have *seen* his glory, the glory as of a Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." They knew they were not in the presence of simply *another* great person in history, but they were truly in the presence of *God*.

The thing is, the Bible is *not* about different folk sitting around and speculating, 'well, I wonder what God might be like?' On the contrary, it's about God revealing himself to humankind, and people experiencing the reality of God. So, for the first Christians, the truth about God coming to dwell among us was first and foremost grounded in their *experience* - "we have *seen* his glory....." Through

knowing Jesus and following him, they came to know God in a very special and personal way.

And so today, we *too* can know God personally through his Son Jesus Christ, born for us that first Christmas. Because of our sinfulness, though – all the darkness in our lives - we are unworthy to actually know the God who made us. But the same Jesus lying in the manger, also died for us on the Cross on Good Friday and rose again that first Easter morning, so that our sins may be forgiven and so that we may have eternal life in him. Jesus makes it possible for us to know God personally. The words of the prophet Isaiah, written many centuries before, find their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus – *he* is the One in whom "all the ends of the earth [have seen] the salvation of [] God."

In fact, a little later on in John's Gospel, we come across what's probably become the most famous verse in the Bible – "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Eternal life isn't only about what happens to us when we die, but it begins in the 'here & now', as we live each day of our lives in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

So, if we have grasped what Christmas is *really* all about, then our lives can never be the same again. Because Christmas poses each and every one of us with a real and very personal challenge. For God invites *us* to know him personally through his one and only Son. At the time of Jesus' coming 2000 years ago, most of those to whom he came – the people of Israel, God's chosen people – failed to accept that invitation. And many today also choose to reject Jesus – choosing to remain in the darkness rather than come to the light.

So, the question is, are *we* willing to accept the Lord Jesus into *our* lives – to allow him to cast out *our* sin and enter in, to be born in *us* today – to allow his *light* to shine into the darkness of *our* lives. For “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.....born.....of

God.” This is God's promise to *us*. When we accept Christ we become children of God – we are born again, as it were, through the power of his Holy Spirit.

There's a song which is played over and over again at this time of year, which goes like this:

*Last Christmas I gave you my heart
But the very next day you gave it away.
This year, to save me from tears
I'll give it to someone special.*

This Christmas, who will *you* give *your* heart to? May it be your desire to give your heart to someone really special – to the Lord Jesus, the true Light of the World. When you do so, you will certainly *not* be disappointed.