

Homily based on the readings from December 24, 2024 (Isaiah 9.1-6, Titus 2.11-14, Luke 2.1-14)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. All of us here tonight have lived our entire lives in the era of artificial lighting. During the nighttime, if we want to read a book or walk around the house or go for a drive, all we have to do is flip a switch. That has not been the case for most of human history. It is difficult for us to imagine the frightful power that *darkness* held over most people. A candle or an oil lamp could barely scratch its surface. We can attempt to recreate the experience of total darkness when we are camping or on board a ship or at midnight Mass, but we can never truly know what it was like.

We can also never know what it was like to live in a world into which Christ had not yet been born. Even though God had spoken to the Jewish people “in many and various ways,” they had not yet experienced the fullness of God’s self-revelation. They had not heard Jesus’ teachings, not witnessed his Crucifixion and Resurrection, not

experienced the saving power of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. The whole human race, in fact, was a people walking in darkness.

Then, in a single moment, just over 2000 years ago, a light *burst* into the world – a light that would overcome the darkness, that would shine “upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom.” Jesus Christ was born in a stable in Bethlehem – born to Mary and Joseph, born to the Jewish people, born to the whole human race. The shepherds, *enveloped* in the darkness of night, saw the glory of the Lord shining around them and were “struck with great fear.” Nevertheless, trusting the message of the angel, they became the first people – apart from Mary and Joseph – to behold the light of Christ.

On “this most sacred night,” we remember and celebrate “the true light” that came into the world and has never left it. With “abundant joy and great rejoicing,” we celebrate the birth of Christ our savior:

For a child is born to us, a son is given us;

upon his shoulder dominion rests.

They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,

Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.

We rejoice in his birth in Bethlehem all those centuries ago. We celebrate his death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We eagerly “await the blessed hope” of his coming again in glory. More than that, we recognize his presence, here and now – in this very building – in the tabernacle and on the altar. The same “infant wrapped in swaddling clothes” – whom the angels proclaimed, whom the shepherds adored, whom Mary and Joseph safeguarded – is fully present – body, blood, soul, and divinity – in even the *tiniest* fragment of every consecrated host. The angels do not need to lead us to a stable in Bethlehem; they join with us *right here* in heavenly worship.

Just as we have never encountered true *physical* darkness, we will never experience the darkness of the absence of Christ. Jesus Christ has

“driven darkness from the world” once and for all. All we need to do is listen to the message of the angels, imitate the simple faith of the shepherds, and have the courage to open our eyes.

Tonight, as we bask in the brilliance of Christ, we must not forget the command he gave us – never to hide that light under a bushel. Through our words and deeds, through sharing the Good News, we must bring the light of Christ to *all* our brothers and sisters. Just like John the Baptist, we are called to bear witness to the light – to reflect Christ’s radiance upon everyone we meet. We must join with the angels on high, proclaiming the “good news of great joy,” for the “true light that enlightens every man” has come into the world. *Our* mission – today and every day – is to “[t]ell his glory among the nations.”

God bless you all, and have a happy Christmas.