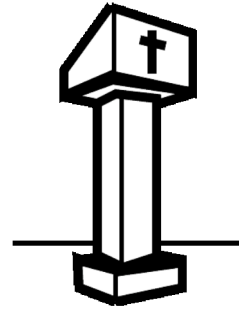


Sermon Synopsis –
Christmas Eve Sermon
Preached by Fr. Peter Champion



“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.”

Thirty years ago tonight, Susan and I were doing exactly what you’re doing here this evening—attending Christmas worship with our parish family at Christ Church in Puyallup, Washington. We heard the same readings and sang many of the same hymns, and shared the body and blood of Christ at our Christ-Mass, just as we will in a bit.

But that same evening we were anxiously awaiting the overdue arrival of a child of our own. We’d anticipated our own newborn babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, but she was uncooperative and didn’t arrive until January 3rd of the following year. Our anxious waiting was a bit different than that of most expectant couples. Because our daughters are adopted, we waited not only for a baby’s arrival, but were also very anxious about whether the birthmother would go through with her decision to sign relinquishment papers and allow us to adopt her newborn. We lived in anticipation of a great light, but felt helpless and in the dark, wondering if that promised light would arrive to shine in our hearts and lives.

Our almost-30 daughter Laura—the object of our anticipation and anxiety all those years ago—was planning to be here with us as we celebrate the birth of the baby whose birth changed the world. However, she, her husband, Dan, and our grandson, Thomas, are at our house nursing wicked colds.

Laura and Dan also traveled through a time of great darkness en route to this evening. Many of you remember that 18 months ago, Laura had an ectopic pregnancy which led to the loss of their unborn child. Early in her next pregnancy, Laura had a hard time trusting and hoping that this time things would be okay. Her son, Thomas, is a sign of hope granted and trust fulfilled. He is a light that brightens our lives.

As much as the familiar words of Luke’s Gospel tell the story of the first Christmas, for me this year, I hear the spiritual story of Christmas in the prophetic words that Isaiah spoke to the people of Israel 2500 years ago.

Who among us has not walked in darkness? Who of us have not spent times living in lands of deep darkness? Haven’t we all found ourselves at the intersection of hope and fear? The Israelites Isaiah spoke to in his prophecy were exiled far from their home in Assyria. Who among us hasn’t yearned for a home that is far away or no longer exists except in our memories?

Many people have experienced the darkness of discrimination, oppression, violence, but even those of us who haven’t know what it is to harbor that deep hope for a better

future—for something we desire so strongly that we can almost taste it, yet which at the same time seems a million miles away. For healing, for peace, for justice, for light.

Christmas is God's declaration that the light is stronger than darkness. The light of God's peace, justice, love and hope is triumphing over the darkness that threatens to overwhelm us and render us hopeless. Christmas is God's declaration that life has meaning, purpose and direction—that it is not meaningless. On Christmas, God tells us that the darkness is not final. In fact, the light is already here, growing slowly brighter until that time when God brings the dawning to completion. After the darkness, the light of God's love, justice and redemption will shine for us. The psalmist said it well in Psalm 30—"weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning."

If you look out our windows, we see we are surrounded by deep darkness. Here we sit, an island of God's light in the midst of that darkness. Indeed, there are many in our world today who see only darkness—that love, peace, justice and hope are just pipedreams—that life is tough and then you die.

The final part of the Christmas message is that the light shines for every person, even and especially for those who can't see it. And if we are to find a way to appropriate the Christmas message into our lives, I suggest that we are called to carry the light we find here out into a land of deep darkness, so that others can find the light too.

Because God knows all our darkneses, our darkest fears and our deepest hopes. God knows them all because God-with-us, Emmanuel, Jesus, is born in a stable and lives among us as one of us. And the coming of Jesus signals the first hint that the new day—God's day—has begun. It is not yet complete, but we believe that it is coming.

All this—meaning, direction, hope, trust, joy—is an awfully big burden for a tiny baby in a manger to carry. But when we can see that baby with the eyes of faith and learn again to hope and trust, we find that great joy the angels proclaimed that first Christmas.

This evening, and in the days and the year ahead, I pray that each of us will remember the great light that first shone on that night 2000 years ago. Even when we find ourselves in the dark, as we undoubtedly will, may we grab hold of the hope and trust the great light of Christmas guarantees. But more than just that, I pray that the great light of Jesus Christ will be reflected in our lives, so that those who feel trapped in darkness come to know the light of Christ which can and does pierce through their deepest darkness too.