

Homily. Christmas Eve/Christmas Day. 24/25 December 2023.

From our long Christian tradition it's our belief that Jesus was born at night, a belief that contains much powerful symbolism. Jesus came into a world that was engulfed by much spiritual and social darkness. An Emperor, a Caesar and his army, ruled with force and violence over most of the known world. Slavery was common place, violence in the Arenas was seen as entertainment, many ordinary folk were impoverished, exiled, marginalised and multiple powerless pagan gods were worshiped to no effect. The land and people of Palestine were occupied by Roman power, forced to pay Roman taxes, work on Roman projects and were allowed to worship their own one, singular God only if they caused no trouble. Some say that the facts of all of this haven't changed much at all.

It was into such a darkened world that Jesus was born, the child of a small Jewish family already upset by having to travel far from Northern Nazareth to register for a Roman Census that was aimed at increasing taxation upon them. He came among us from a famous but very small town called Bethlehem, some 9 kilometres South East of Jerusalem. This town lies today in what we call the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, as darkened by conflict and social troubles now as it ever has been.

Yes, this was the scene wherein the light of God which gives light to the world was born, the King of Kings announced by Angels, found lying in a manger, an animals feed box, by lonely shepherds watching at night over their flocks, protecting them from theft and slaughter by hungry people. All of which tells us that God, the real, true and living God has entered into and embraced the darkness of our world, the darkness in human

history and the darkness within our hearts so that something bright, new, wise, healing and merciful might be born to shine over us, casting out all darkness. His old name is Emmanuel, God with us as one of us. His new given name is Jesus, a name which means God Saves, for as light pushes back the darkness, so only the divine light of God can overcome and defeat dark mistrust, fear, hatred, violence and self interest.

In the child Jesus this great liberating work of God for us has begun. It still goes on today and everyday with our cooperation as we choose love and service over personal power, comfort and our want to satisfy ourselves. Our Christmas feast is about this undying hope, a hope that leads us to gift and to share with others in joy and peace, tonight, tomorrow, always. Once the Sun rises it's light can for a while be obscured but it's course can't be stopped. So, too, it is with the power of Christ's birth, God's Sons unquenchable light given for us until the great day when we are freed from all of the darkness.

He comes to us now as we celebrate and welcome him again in the Eucharist; holy bread broken and holy wine from crushed grapes shared, his own life and light-giving Spirit living within us. What better gift can we ask for or hope to receive for ourselves and for the future? For this is why we are gathered here; to adore Jesus, God's salvation, and then to go on to live and become for others, the Light from all Light that we joyfully celebrate, receive and share.