

“Holy Light Shining in Darkness”
Christmas Eve Mass – December 24, AD 2019
St. Luke ii: 1-14

How fitting it is that Christians everywhere celebrate the coming of the Christ child during the nighttime hours on Christmas Eve. It was during the night that our Lord most likely was born as Mary and Joseph attempted to find suitable lodging but had to settle for a stable. As we heard in the Gospel reading, shepherds were *“abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night”* when an angel proclaimed to them the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord. Suddenly the night must have exploded with light as the heavenly host of angels proclaimed: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”* Why this exultation of the heavens? Because in the fullness of time the God of all creation has entered into a most personal relationship with humanity. Paradoxically, the God of all glory and might has emptied himself of such glory and might to be enfleshed in the form of his only begotten Son, Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. This great mystery brings with it a most intense and holy light that pierces the darkness.

Light and the absence of light, or darkness, are spoken of throughout Holy Scripture to represent spiritual realities. We must be alert to their meaning and interaction if we are to know fully what God intends for our lives. Let's start at the beginning, in the book of Genesis. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."* That seems like a description of chaos and disorder, doesn't it? But wait, God had a plan. *"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."* Thus, at the very start of the creation of the world, light was there at God's word to bring order out of chaos. Spirit and physical matter interacting together to fulfill God's purposes.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God with God, and the Word was God," is how St. John's Spirit-inspired articulation of the Incarnation begins. Because that Word became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, we know that Jesus was there at the very beginning with God, and with God's Spirit. And so it is that St. Paul can say in 1st Corinthians 8:6: *"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are*

all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”

God has always shown special favor and supernatural illumination to his people by means of light. Remember in the book of Exodus how God provided a pillar of fire to lead the Israelites by night. When David finds deliverance from his enemies and King Saul, he sings a song of praise in which light becomes a metaphor for the Lord: *“For thou art my lamp, O Lord: and the Lord will lighten my darkness.”* [2 Samuel 22:29] In the Psalms images of light are used to extoll God’s law, his holy Word, for providing strength, wisdom, and moral guidance, as in Psalm 119: *“Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”* [Psalm 119:104-105] In certain messianic passages of the great prophets, light is linked to a coming salvation. From Isaiah we hear prophetic passages like these: *“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”* [Isaiah 9:2] When the longed for “day of the Lord” arrives, the prophet Zechariah states *“But it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”* [Zech. 14:7b]

When Divine Spirit and physical matter interact, a miracle of holy light is often revealed to the benefit of our sin-sick souls. Another word for that happening is Grace. What Grace is was when the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that by the power of the Holy Ghost she will conceive in her womb a son whose name will be JESUS (Savior), and He *“shall be called the Son of God.”* Mary was chosen by God to be the Theotokos, the God Bearer, the mother of our Lord and Savior. She said ‘yes’ to God, and the Incarnation happened. It is in the historical record. It may be ancient history as we humans measure time, but the effect of that cosmic event resounds throughout all the ages past, present, and to come.

And so we are here tonight to celebrate once again the fulfillment of prophecy in the birth of Jesus Christ, True God and True Man; the One whom we worship and adore; the One whom we confess in our Creed as “Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God.” Only He who is in complete unity with God can say what Jesus says in John’s Gospel, *“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”* [St. John 8:12] We celebrate again this

supernatural miracle of Spirit interacting with matter, which gives us the surpassing love of God in the person of Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem. The comfortable words from St. John are as true now as they were then: “*So God loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” [St. John 3:16] How can we ever repay such a life-giving and death-defeating gift?

Tonight, by the Grace of God you have the opportunity to begin to reciprocate that love by joining with all the heavenly hosts and your brothers and sisters in Christ to proclaim with joy the good news that the “Prince of Peace” prophesied by Isaiah has come. You can begin to reciprocate His love by participating tonight in another miracle of Spirit interacting with matter—the Holy Eucharist. When you participate in the Eucharist with penitent and thankful hearts, you enter into intimate communion with that Holy Light, the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. By Grace of the Holy Ghost, you will be empowered to be, in the words of St. Paul to Titus, “*a peculiar people, zealous of good works,*” a people that will “*live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great*

God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” This Holy Light “shining in darkness” will empower you to fight the forces of spiritual darkness within yourself and within the world. It’s a tough fight, as we all know. The devil is devious and will try to get us to believe that darkness is light and holiness is bad. But know this—the ultimate victor over the powers of spiritual darkness and death is Jesus Christ. Together, as Christ’s Body the Church, filled with the Holy Ghost, we are empowered to be what St. Peter calls us to be in his 1st Epistle General: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;” [1 Peter 2:9] Yes, the light of Christ has entered this Holy Night to be with us in His temple at His altar, and in our daily lives. To this I can only say ...

unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, let there be ascribed all might, majesty, honor, and dominion as is most justly due this day, both now and forever, Alleluia! Amen!