

Christmas Day – 2025

Isaiah 52:7-10

Hebrews 1:1-12

John 1:1-18

Christmas is a marvelous blend of mystery and joy. Christmas is the antidote to man's loneliness, the antidote to man's groping around in the dark, man's futile efforts to save himself. As a child, do you remember having a feeling that there was something deeply important and wondrous and mysterious about Christmas, but it was elusive to your mind? You sensed it on some level – that there was something unique and different and compelling about Christmas that lay hidden beneath trees and presents and tinsel? I have a dear friend who said to me recently that the older he gets the more he realizes how little he knows. How many of y'all can relate? And then, in the next breath, he recounted his less than stellar behavior as it relates to one of God's greatest commands – loving our neighbor, that too often he just pretended. The Prologue to John's Gospel, that extraordinary Gospel reading for Christmas morning, plows head on into all these facets of God's interaction with us.

There are some realities that we can't "all-the-way" grasp. We catch glimpses, we taste them faintly, and the beauty of these revelations rocks our world. We have known love, but do you believe that love is deeper, stronger, more fulsome and exquisite than what we have known thus far? God became man. I can say it matter-of-factly, I can say it emphatically, I can say it appreciatively, but there's more to this phrase than I can comprehend. Not because God is elusive or because He wants to keep me in the dark or because I'm just not that smart (which I'm admittedly not). It's because man cannot exhaust God. Man is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. It's because God's work is deeper than me. It's because there is an infinite richness to Christmas, an infinite love lies beneath it and I am mortal, finite, a mere man. But there are some windows into the Incarnation that enlarge my mind and make my spirit soar.

"The light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). Darkness; that is the world which is estranged from its Creator. I'm familiar with darkness. Darkness is a direct consequence of sin. Light and darkness are antithetical to one another. Darkness is Satan's domain. He is the prince of darkness, a force of darkness, a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). The world is shrouded in darkness (Isaiah 25:7). The world has a death-loving affinity for darkness. Your sinful nature lies to you and tells you that darkness is just a part of living, just a natural and reasonable aspect of human experience. This is the verdict, the judgement: light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light for their deeds were evil (John 3:19). There is a moral component to life as a human. God created our human race to be participants in His life, to be agents of goodness, agents who act in keeping with His will. Darkness, theologically defined, is defiance of God, defiance of what He created us to be. Light came into this world because humanity had become dark and dead. The Word was made flesh because the human cause had itself become dark and dead.

Light is our liberator. The baby in that manger is Light incarnate, and He came to make His light shine. Oh, how the darkness hated Him! Oh, how the darkness hates Him still! But the darkness has not overcome Him, the darkness has not been able to put the Light out. That is wonderful! It's His cross! Light shines from the cross and it can't be put out. Light; it's the

resurrection and the church and it is faith and it's heaven. The cross of our Lord Jesus is unconquerable because it is *His* cross. The wondrous and exquisite cross is light in darkness. How often have you taken refuge in Christ and His love, Christ and His forgiveness, Christ and His cross? When darkness invades, when the oppression of a faithless world comes too close, when loneliness and fear and guilt press you sore, have you been comforted by the Light of salvation, the Light of truth, the Light of blood and death and resurrection and baptism and eucharist?

Light came into the arena of darkness and He wasn't well-received; because humanity is warped; because we had no experience with Immanuel; because our sinful nature craved something else. But He came. And He brought life. And He shares His life. And He gives of Himself unreservedly. My mind can't grasp it all, but it is there, limitless and beautiful and enriching and compelling and it creates joy. In the '90's there was a dis that became part of our cultural lexicon: talk to the hand because the face isn't listening. Talk to the hand; it was a sassy way to shut someone down when you didn't want to hear their opinion. Talk to the hand. The world, when we speak of Christ's cross, holds up a hand and utters a hipster quip because it doesn't want to hear. Darkness is addicting and the world is a pusher. Light doesn't stay in its appointed lane. Light invades. God has made His Light to shine in you. This is not an abstraction, not a disincarnate physics kind of light – *Christ* shines in you, His love, His sacrifice, His victory over death, His majesty, His forgiveness and His truth. The Light shines in the darkness and that is wonderful, a source of joy, a blessing that lifts us out of self and death and shame and hell.

My friend said that for much of his life he pretended to love his neighbor. It's difficult to know exactly what he means, but I suspect that he's being hard on himself and that he wants to have his new self go back and live life again and do it better. This may sound silly, but are you a better kisser after you have brushed your teeth and rinsed your mouth out with minty Scope or when you just wake up from a long sleep after having too much garlic and humus and onions and sardines and cabernet and curry the night before? Do you enjoy going to your mailbox the day after you mowed the lawn or the day before when it is unkempt and unruly. Does a young lad, hoping to impress a young lass on their first date, clean his car or does he disregard the fast-food wrappers that litter the passenger seat and the smelly gym clothes in the back seat that fumigate his horseless carriage? Christ shares His life. The Word was made flesh, meaning He ventured into our humanity to *change* our humanity. Jesus said: "I am the vine; you are the branches" (John 15:5). That is Christmas. "If a man remains in me and I in him he will produce much fruit" (John 15:5). That is Christmas. "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). That is Christmas. Christmas is expansive. Christmas is in you. "For it is God who is at work in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13 NIV). That is Christmas.

Love your neighbor as yourself. The Son of God became our neighbor and He doesn't pretend. It wasn't a partial commitment. He didn't adopt "some" of our humanity. He didn't dip His toe into the human pool and then consider how He might circumvent some of our less attractive aspects. Fully, completely, with unreserved commitment, God Himself became our neighbor and loved us to the very end (John 13:1). You know this mystery, this love, and that is what brings you here. There's more. You know this mystery and so you begin to love others as He has first loved you. Christmas is in your heart. Christmas is in your soul. It is still a mystery. The fullness of God was thoroughly present in that infant boy. Because of Christmas, loving others is

a joy to you. Giving of yourself to those in need is a blessing to you. God is with us. God is completely, fully, magnificently with us and that makes life joyful, it makes our crosses easier to bear, it forges a community that is built on eternal truths, a strong and pleasant and resilient and industrious and deeply bonded community – Christ's church is built on Christmas. Celebrate, my dear friends. Rejoice, and sing and let your heart be merry. The meaning of Christmas is growing in your heart. God reveals the mystery to you more and more as you age, as you consider His grace, His presence in our humanity, His presence in Word and Sacrament. Be assured of this: the wonder of Christmas is ever green, roses in winter, calm in a storm, life in the realm of sickness and death. Christ the Savior is born.