

Homily for December 25, 1999
Cycle B, Christmas Midnight Mass

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 9:1-6
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14 and Luke 2:15-20

We are God's light for our world.

Now a days it's hard even to imagine the degree of darkness that used to descend on the earth as soon as the sun went down. In human settlements there would be fires and lamps, but these gave little light compared to the vastness of the surrounding dark. Caught out on the roads or in the distant pastures, one might have to get along all night with no light at all.

People in such circumstances knew the reality of physical darkness in a way that few of us do anymore, living as we do in a world saturated with artificial light. Increasingly, streetlights, headlights, security lights of all kinds, illuminate the outdoors, while indoors our rooms fill with dazzling light at our command, day or night.

To understand the good news of Christmas, perhaps we might attempt to imagine ourselves back in the era before electric lights. Imagine what it would be like to be out on the road long after sunset, completely at the mercy of a starless, moonless night. Then imagine seeing a small light in the distance – and

knowing, with infinite relief in one's heart, that this God-forsaken darkness is not the final word in the story of one's life.

Christmas day is like that first glimpse of trembling light that is still far from complete dawn, yet confirms for us that we are not abandoned forever to the darkness. Even though most of us today cannot experience the radicalness of the physical shift from darkness to a pinpoint of light, we are still equally in need of the similar shift that occurs with the coming of "the Good News" of Christmas. The vast dark areas are all around us. Just to name a few: the fury of racial and ethnic hatreds, the greed of those who destroy delicate ecological balances for a day's profit, the callused hearts of those who abuse vulnerable children or prisoners or service workers. To be caught up in these or other breeches of justice can be to feel as overwhelmed by darkness as the first-century traveler who was out on the road at night. In such situations, to see even the smallest glimmer of goodness may feel as monumental as did that mere trace of light on the horizon.

And so we receive our Christmas vocation – really the vocation of every Christian: to be that trace of goodness, of light in the face of whatever form of darkness we find ourselves walking into. Our particular

place of darkness is probably as near as our own home, our workplace, our neighborhood, or our parish. It may not be our gift to fill the whole place with light.

Rather, our calling may be simply that small ray of “something different”; to be that wink of light that lets people know that even when the darkness baffles us with its persistence, the light of God is dwelling quietly in our midst. ...And we are that light, bearers of the hope born of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is our privilege and pleasure to become what we receive at this holy table: the glorified flesh and blood of Jesus Christ and to be that same for the world we touch.

We are God’s light for our world.