

The Light of Christ



At Christmas, we remember Christ coming into our world as a vulnerable human baby. During the season of Advent, the Church ponders this strange action of God, why Christ became one of us, and what it means for us as human beings and for our relationship with creation.

In the above photograph, the early morning rays of the sun are lighting up some pot plants outside our chapel transforming their appearance. In order for this photo to exist, a number of events had to come together. First, the morning sun had to shine unhindered by any clouds or foliage of the tall gum trees in the east and at a particular angle so as to illuminate the plants situated under the eaves of the chapel. Next, I had to come along at the right moment, notice what was happening, and take the photo.

For the birth of Jesus to take place, both Mary and Joseph had to cooperate with God's plan. It was not just that they had to hear and obey

God's communications to them, but they had to accept that this birth would result in unexpected journeys, criticism and grief, as well as joy, for them.

The fact that Mary could not give birth at home because of a decree from Emperor Augustus, or even at an inn in Bethlehem because she and Joseph arrived too late, made their situation far from ideal. Life must have looked and felt rather ordinary and dark. This amazing birth foretold by God had ended up with them in a stable and only an animal's feeding trough in which to place their new born son. Then visitors arrived, shepherds.

These men had been out in the fields watching their sheep when an intense light suddenly shone around them. They were terrified. An angel appeared and told them a child had been born who was a Saviour, the Christ, and they would find him lying in a manger. The shepherds were now confused as well as fearful, but they immediately went into Bethlehem to look for the baby. They found him and told Mary, Joseph and anyone else they came across, what they had seen and been told by the angel.

We might wonder, when the shepherds first saw the helpless baby Jesus in a manger, did the light of Christ they had seen in the fields transform for them what could have been a rather depressing scene? Also, did their words and actions transform the lives of Joseph and Mary and reveal to them a little more about Jesus and his birth into the world?

At this point we could say that without the sun's morning rays behind it, the collection of pot plants outside our chapel also looked rather ordinary. The background was messy and dark, the tallest flower head was nearly dead and several other blooms were yet to emerge. But the sun's bright light changed everything. The reality of God's presence in the plants was revealed. In our lives we may have experienced times when we suddenly saw a situation differently, or began to understand something of God's presence and life in the whole of creation, nature, animals, men and women and the loving interactions between them.

Just as clouds and trees can prevent the sun from shining on the pot

plants, so our moods and the various distractions that sometimes control our minds can block what the light of Christ might wish to show us. When we are focusing on ourselves and our troubles, it is easy to miss seeing God's presence around us, even if it is lit up by the light of Christ. But, what exactly is the 'light of Christ?'

In the Gospel of John, chapter 1, Jesus, the Christ, is explained as the life of God through whom all things came into being. To talk about the presence of God or Christ in any meaningful way is practically impossible, so John does his best by using images such as 'the Word' and 'the light' for Christ. If we focus on 'the light', in verses 4-5 we read, "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Knowing this life of Christ which gives life and light to everything in our world can encourage us to respect, appreciate and care for both people and nature.

When Jesus was born, God entered our world in a new way. Christ was, of course, already present in the life of the world, because all people and all God's creation, in some way, are in Christ, and Christ in them. The coming of Jesus as a human baby sharing our lives of anxiety, joy, suffering and death, helped and still helps men and women to better know how to share God's love with others.

When we reflect on the year 2020, the coronavirus pandemic has made it one of pain, stress, grief and death for the whole world. It has also been one in which many people have become more aware and caring of one another.

The photo of the pot plants reminds us of the reality of the presence of Christ in us, others and all creation. This Divine life or light is especially with us in the many dark places of our lives, and is never overcome.

In amongst the joy, the tinsel, the sharing of gifts at family parties and the grief of the lonely, can the light of Christ illuminate the truth of God's love for us and all people as we celebrate this Christmas, in 2020?

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