

Christmas Eve 2010
Twente

Isaiah 52.7-10:2-7
Hebrews 1:1-4, John 1:1-14

The Light Shines in the Darkness

Imagine how it was in the beginning. There was darkness. (Turn out the lights and blow out candles.)

The ancient Jewish scriptures tell the story of the beginning with God:

Genesis 1 1:¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good...

The cosmic beginning is not unlike our individual beginnings, in a way.

Each of us is born out of darkness. In our mother's wombs, we lived for months in darkness. Yes, we saw vague light and received warmth. But at the end of 9 months we emerged into the light.

Most babies do not rejoice when they emerge from the darkness into the light. Instead we cry out. We are not used to the light; we miss the darkness. But we must learn to live in the light. It is something we must do to become ourselves, to know the freedom and the risk of living our own lives to the fullest. We are meant to dwell in the light.

Few of us, once we have grown into the light, would want to return to the dark, however comfortable it was, even if we could. But regardless, we cannot.

St John writes about the beginning of all things from the Christian perspective. His Gospel gives the NT Genesis:

1:¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being

through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

[Light the Pascal Candle]

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it... ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

Why? Why did, why do people not accept the Light of the World, the Light of Life, the one that made the world and became a part of it in order to save it?

That too is a mystery, why people prefer the darkness to the light. But that, I suppose, is was not unexpected.

The great Greek philosopher Plato, who lived 350 years before Jesus came to earth, wrote in his greatest work, *The Republic*, about how people prefer darkness to light, in his famous Allegory of the Cave.

Plato describes how people are chained at the bottom of a dark Cave, where they can only look at a wall. Behind them, their captors are letting people and animals walk back and forth in front of a fire, so that the prisoners, on their wall, can only see vague images dancing in front of them.

For the prisoners, this is the only so-called reality they have ever known or seen: a shadowy, dark dance of strange images on a wall.

In a way, Plato can be credited for predicting the basic technical principles of modern cinema (which most of us enjoy in a healthy way). But the Allegory of the Cave was intended as a philosophical critique, a rejection of the false life of darkness that we so easily accept as reality, because we're accustomed to it.

In Plato's allegory, one prisoner is suddenly freed, and escapes the Cave to see the world above and beyond it, where everything is light, vivid and colourful. When we light Christmas lights and put in the windows of our houses, it is the Light of Life we are reminding each other about. The Light of Christ.

In Plato's allegory, the freed prisoner decides to return to the Cave, to tell the prisoners about the Light above, to excite them so they will want to be free. But they do not want to know. His tale sounds absurd to them. And so they try to kill him.

St John writes:¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

Love came down at Christmas in the babe born at Bethlehem. But not all have chosen to receive him. And so his journey was from the Cradle to the Cross.

But ... ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

You and I did not choose to be born into this world at this place and time. But we can choose to receive the gift of Christ, to become a child of God, to live by the Light of Christ. We can turn to and live by the Light of Christ.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us – the Maker of all pitched a tent in our dark and cold world – and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

George Orwell once said, 'In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.' Jesus knows what that was about. He paid the price. But we were worth it to Him. Love came down at Christmas; it was the bright Light of true Life shining in the darkness; and it will never die. May we see, follow and show that Light. Amen.