

Triumphant Light

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"

Texts: Isaiah 52:7-10

Hebrews 1:1-4, 5-12 (Series C, Nativity of Our Lord) Ps.98

John 1:1-14

Prayer:

When John the Baptist "appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," he announced the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus in these words: "After me comes He who is mightier than I am, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop and untie" (*Mk. 1:4, 7*). This passage reminds me of the story of a former mayor of the City of Boston.

In keeping with his campaign promises to remain in close touch with the needs of the people, especially the poor, the mayor, soon after he was elected, spent several days in the city slums undercover. Unshaven, and dressed in tattered clothes, he went to a shabby boarding house and begged to have a room for the night.

"I'll give you a room and breakfast if you'll chop some fire wood," the clerk told him. So, the mayor rolled up his sleeves and began to chop. But it was evident that he had little experience wielding an axe.

A young boarder about to enter the building saw what was happening and said to the mayor, "Mister, give me the axe. You don't know how to use it." Whereupon, the young man, with sure strokes, cut the entire woodpile in short order.

While thanking the young man for his kindness, the mayor decided to reveal his true identity. "Here is my card," he said. "If you will come to my office next week I'll see that you get a job and a better place to live." The young man looked at the card, then walked away, shaking his head and saying to himself, "Poor man! He's crazy! He thinks he's the mayor of Boston!"

The following week, however, he found himself curious enough to visit city hall where, to his surprise and delight, he discovered that the poor man who couldn't swing an axe really was the mayor. And the mayor, true to his promise, gave the young man a job and the opportunity to live in a better place than the seedy rooming house where they had met.

And it came to pass that the News Media picked up the story and it was sent across the country by the wire services. One major newspaper ran the story under the headline: "*The Greatest Social Stoop of the World.*"

At Christmas, we rejoice in the Gospel Truth that "The Greatest Social Stoop Of The World" occurred when, as the Apostle John tells us in today's Lesson, *The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us* And if we were to write our own headline, it might read, *God became one of us to tell us how much He Loves us at Christmas*, enemies at war declare a temporary truce, as if it were somehow more indecent to kill each other on December 25th.

- At Christmas, people extend warm greetings and offer presents to family members and friends.
- At Christmas, there is an unusual display of caring and affection by many people.
- At Christmas, the suffering of the sick and the condition of the lonely seem less acceptable than on other days.
- At Christmas, it seems that almost everyone wants to contribute to the success of the festive holiday.
- At Christmas, more than on any other day it seems, people need the kind of festive spirit that brings peace and light into their lives. Indeed, at Christmas, more than at any other time of year, something comes to life deep within us and gives us light -- not in the form of easy answers to our anxious questions about evil and suffering and death, but in of an Infant, born in a stable, in a town called Bethlehem, two thousand years ago.

Do you remember the story of Nicodemus in John's Gospel? Nicodemus, the scholar, a man of authority among the Jews, came to see Jesus by night. The details of the conversation we do not know... but one thing that emerged from that visit is what Nicodemus said.. *We Know That You Are A Teacher Come From God (Jn. 3:2).*

What Nicodemus himself said in his conversation with Jesus is not often quoted. Yet he gave an unforgettable description of Jesus when he said to Him: *We know that you are a teacher come from God (Jn. 3:2).*

This Teacher who came from God was a Specialist. He taught only one subject. Although it lasts a lifetime, the entire Course can be reduced to just three words: God is love. "God is Love."

It's not meant to be a pious slogan. It's meant to be the Guiding Light toward our life's fulfillment. It's meant to be the basis for an intimate relationship with the Teacher who came from God and identified Himself as the *"Light of the World."*

It's meant to be the supreme expression of the reality that the Power that holds the stars in their places, the Power that controls the rise and ebb of the tides, the Power that keeps the entire Universe in running order, that Power is Love.

It's meant to be the supreme revelation of the Truth, that one who loves God and neighbour is in union with the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of all of life. What happens when the words "God is Love" enter and dominate the core of a person's being to such a degree that they are transformed into the experience of God as Love?

Charles Dickens, who understood this better, and has given us many illustrations, the most notable of which is the character heartless Ebenezer Scrooge. Ebenezer Scrooge was unhappy and could not escape from himself.

But in a dream that Christmas Eve, by the Grace of God Scrooge discovered new life. He was born again! When he opened the window in the morning, the face of the world had changed.

He thought it was a beautiful day. He saw a boy crossing the street and he thought he was a marvelous boy. His daily life became filled with vitality. For Scrooge there were no more dull days. Casual passersby on the street greeted him with a smile, called forth by his own radiant manner.

And this is only the beginning of what happens when the love-lesson of the *Light of the World* enters and dominates the core of one's being! At Christmas, the "God Is Love" Course comes to life, in the Person of the Lord Jesus. At Christmas, in the Presence of our "*Teacher come from God*," we measure our progress.

John tells us in today's Gospel that Jesus is *the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*. As the Spirit of Jesus lives in our hearts, let us release that light from within by being the change we want to find in others and living into our faith through daily prayer-filled practice and action.

Let us live into and out of what we say we believe through the grace upon grace received from the Incarnation of Jesus, our Christ, the Word made flesh who lived among us. And, may this be our first Resolution of the New Year: Begin at the Beginning and follow the Light. As John says, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. Jesus, our Redeemer Christ, let us begin again with You.

The Apostle John has given us a test that is at once simple and infallible. At Christmas, we prepare for our final examination to be conducted by the Teacher Himself:

- When I was hungry, did you give Me food?
- When I was thirsty, did you give Me drink?
- When I was sick or lonely, did you visit Me?
- When I was naked, did you clothe Me?
- When I was a stranger, did you welcome Me?
- When I was in need, did you help Me?
- When I came into your life, did you love Me?

The most wonderful, the most glorious, the most eventful visit ever made was when God stooped low and became flesh in the form of an Infant, in a stable, in the Town of Bethlehem. There, God became one of us to tell us how much He loves us.

Prayer: Jesus, God's Ever-Present Glory and Truth, You came as God's flesh and blood among us in Your humanity; in Your divinity, You are our grace upon grace. As You have clothed us in the garments of Salvation, guide us to be Your Light in our world that the darkness of evil cannot overcome. We ask through God, our Divine Creator; who together with You and the Holy Spirit, the ever-Flowing Fire of our souls; are One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn: **#296, # 284, #287**