

HOMILY
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN
TUESDAY, 25 DECEMBER 2018
CHRISTMAS DAY
ST CHRISTOPHER'S CATHEDRAL

Readings

Isaiah 9: 1-7

Titus: 2: 11-14

Gospel: Luke 2: 1-14

We gather with our family, friends and indeed with all Christians throughout the world on this Christmas night – day. God has loved us and graced us by sending us his Son Jesus Christ as the Child of Bethlehem. We are filled with joy!

On the First Christmas it seemed that nothing important was going to happen. As mentioned in the First Reading all was in darkness. The prophet Isaiah prophesises that something great will happen in this darkness. "The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone."

The Gospel from St Luke calls to mind the birth of Jesus in the humble stable of Bethlehem.

It happened in the middle of the night. Joseph and pregnant Mary were in Jerusalem because of the census the emperor had ordered. Everybody had to return to their place of origin. So they left Nazareth and went down to a suburb of Jerusalem called Bethlehem.

On the night of the birth of Jesus there was another type of darkness too. They were looking for appropriate accommodation. None was to be found. The scripture describes it in this very sad line of the Gospels, "there was no room for them at the inn." Into this darkness, not only cosmic but also the darkness of inhospitality, is born the humble Child of God, Jesus the Lord and Saviour.

What joy the coming of the Lord gives. The least amongst the people are the first to recognise the greatness of the moment. They are the humble shepherds. They become the first evangelises and missionaries of Christianity. Jesus is placed in a manger. A feeding trough for animals. Already what the great New Testament believed, that Jesus is our food for the journey of life, is suggested. He is placed in swaddling clothes and we presume that the manger was made of wood. Again the poetry of the scriptures suggests his final destiny. Death on the Cross of Calvary but resurrected gloriously at Easter were similar white clothes are found covering the body of Christ before His Resurrection.

I came across a little expression recently which I thought was a beautiful way of understanding Christmas.

The saying goes, "a lighted candle walked into a darkened room. And that lighted candle said to the darkened room...I beg to differ."

We too often see ourselves living in an Australian land of plenty, but there is so much darkness of inhospitality and selfishness. You only have to think of the issue of homelessness, the fragility of families in regard to domestic violence, the issues we still have with migrants, refugees and of course our Aboriginal peoples of Australia.

In the midst of all this darkness comes Christ the light of Christmas. We Christians are the light of Christ. We say to a world in darkness and selfishness that "we beg to differ" from the narrative that can easily drag us down and make us feel quite despairing and hopeless.

On the contrary, we are people of hope because Christ is our hope. With great confidence, courage and hope we enter defiantly into our world and offer an alternative...we beg to differ. We replace selfishness with selflessness. We replace despair with hope and we replace coldness with warmth.

So, on this Christmas day and in the days to follow, let us be the light in the darkness. Let us be Christ's Christmas presents to our world.

We all love to receive gifts. It's a great feeling to be loved. The Christ event insists that, although it's great to be loved, it's even greater to love.

Let us be the first, in these days, to show the initiative of love and hope to the world. Let us not wait for people to love us. Let us go out and love them even if there is no reply. That is the Christ response, that is the Christmas response, and that is the cause of our hope this day.