

Christmas Eve—Year B  
Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 96  
Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)  
John 1:1-14

*Never* has a **Christmas night** seemed **darker** than *this one*. And yet, **dark nights have come before**. Isaiah knew that **darkness**, and he proclaimed: **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined**. He knew people had felt **the yoke of their burden, a bar weighing them down across their shoulders**; they had known **oppression**, and they had known **war**. *And yet, Isaiah also knew something else; something was happening* that **broke the hold** of all that weighed so heavy upon them. He proclaims: **For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**. All that weight that had rested upon *their shoulders now* would rest upon *his*. Even their darkness was *now* full of light.

John knew it too and gives it voice in **John 1: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it**.

*It's not that the darkness isn't still dark; it's that the light is still light, and the darkness can't overcome it.*

**On this Christmas night**, we *remember* that **we have been in the darkness before**. I want to thank my good colleague down the road at **St. Mary's, The Rev. Andrew Hege**, for pointing me in the direction of this piece penned in the *Wachovia Moravian* by **Bishop Rondthaler in Christmas 1918**. He speaks first about the **soldiers returning home from WWI**, and then he writes this:

*Prevailing sickness may likewise give the Christmas of 1918 a peculiar character differing from this happy season in other years. As we write, the likelihood is, that clouds of anxiety will hang heavy over many a dear house-hold. It is possible that Christmas gatherings may be few and limited in their numbers.*

*Let us try to make up for what may be wanting in the Christmas of 1918, by special efforts along other lines. Let us try to be more thankful for our own mercies. Let us be more sympathetic with the sorrows of others. Let us be sure, more carefully than ever, to remember the poor. Let us study more closely how to give cheer to somebody else's Christmas which otherwise might be lonesome and dreary. Let us think of everybody more kindly and of our Savior more trustfully and perhaps after all the Christmas of 1918, may shine out more brightly in our memories of it, than we thought it would.*

**Bishop Rondthaler** knew all too well the **darkness of his time**, but *he also knew* the light couldn't be overcome, **AND** he knew that *we have a role to play in proclaiming that good news*.

**On that dark night long ago, AND in the dark of this night**, God takes the supremely audacious leap of faith, a completely irrational act of solidarity, and **FLINGS DIVINITY INTO OUR FLESH**. *This night*, God leaps into the **deep end**, taking on *fully all* of our vulnerability, *all* of our powerlessness, *all* of our fear and anxiety and **out-of-control feelings**, *all* of our poverty and loneliness and isolation; God takes *all* of this on in a little bundle of flesh that can only find his way **IN COMMUNION** with other bundles of flesh.

*Whatever we feel this night, God felt it on that night long ago, so did Mary, so did Joseph, so did everyone who risked that cold, dark night to gaze upon the light that the darkness couldn't overcome.*

**And the solidarity we feel with this God-made-flesh binds us forever with *all* the other bundles of flesh throughout the ages, bundles of flesh *all* made holy this night.**

It doesn't fix the pandemic; it doesn't fix systemic racism; it doesn't fix climate change and unemployment and profound human suffering, and the other host of intractable problems we face on this Christmas night, *AND YET*, the God revealed this night—a God who is willing to take *all of that* on, a God who replaces words of comfort *with the Word made flesh*, who pierces the darkness and silence of this night with *sheer DIVINE PRESENCE*—the God revealed this night lifts the burden *off* our shoulders and takes it on *God's* own. **AND**, we midwife this birth of divinity in one another as we watch the **RADIANCE** of this holy infant's face speak back into the world through *our* eyes—no mask can hide the glow in our hearts; no mask can keep this light from dancing out of our eyes.

**On this dark Christmas night, a child is born for us, a child is born in us; we are part of the glory of God that can't be contained. *That glory couldn't be contained in 1918, and it can't be contained in 2020.***

**Perhaps Bishop Rondthaler is right—*Perhaps after all, the Christmas of [2020], may shine out more brightly in our memories of it, than we thought it would.* Amen.**

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