

13th December 2020 Third Sunday in Advent

Readings

Isaiah 61: 1 – 4, 8 - 11

Psalm 126

1 Thessalonians 5: 16 - 24

John 1: 6 – 8, 19 - 28

Switch on for Christmas



Christmas cards depicting the birth of Jesus mostly give us peaceful stable scenes after the trauma of a long journey from Nazareth, Joseph not having pre-booked a room and Mary giving birth. They show very little of the chaotic, cruel world going on all around. They are full of light in a darkened world. If I had a big enough canvas and the artistic skills I would love to paint a nativity scene filled with light which radiates through door and window into the surrounding town of Bethlehem, up on to the hills, enriching angel glory, on through Judea and spreading wider and wider to encompass the whole world. John tells us how that is the truth at the heart of Christmas. The Light of the world has come!

Light represents knowledge, truth, goodness, against the darkness of ignorance, chaos, destruction, poverty, death... Preparing for his forerunner role John had spent much time in the desert with the Essene communities who looked for the conquest of light over darkness, truth over ignorance just as the prophets believed would happen with the coming of the Messiah. They saw light as the source of life and revealing everything. God's first words to his world were '*Let there be light.*' And his Son, Jesus affirmed *I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and never walk in the darkness.* He taught that those who follow him will share in banishing fear, disease, warfare, hunger, disease. His light is still spreading across the world – a third of its people will be worshipping him this Christmas – as his transforming light enters lives like ours and they and we switch on to Jesus. In his words to the Christians at Thessalonica Paul gives some advice on how to stay 'switched-on'

Many will have been disappointed this year at not being able to be in the city for the switching on of the Christmas lights. However, there was joy this week at a greater switch-on with the first vaccinations against coronavirus. The light of knowledge and skills of science have shone to make possible the changing of fear to hope, death to life, joy for mourning, and have given a new meaning to our greeting – *A Happy Christmas and New Year!* It has come at a good time and will spread worldwide like the light – just as we celebrate Jesus' birth.

It is believed that Jesus' birthday was really in the Spring – sometime in May - but in about the third century when Christmas was first observed the Church replaced the pagan festivals of light with the celebration of Jesus' coming as Light for the whole world. Those pre-Christian festivals coincided with the days when it was possible to observe the return of the sun and the increase of daylight. Personally, I think it would be wonderful to have a real Celebration feast day of Jesus' birth in May when we could give time to thinking of the wonder of God's coming into his world as one of us. Of course, it would upset the Church's annual calendar of festivals and we would probably still want a festival of light along with other Faiths but it would be a great opportunity to respond to the challenge to switch on to Jesus – turning on the light of faith, hope and love, light by light, life by life, across the world in every generation.

It IS happening and we have the confidence of John's words – *It cannot be switched off* till all universes are filled with the Glory of God in Jesus!

A Prayer

May the light of Christ shine in us
to help others switch on to him
until that light reaches into all the
darkest places and experiences of our world.



Nightfall and morning
Winter dark and Spring light
The sun is never switched off
Nor is the Light of the World
Jesus Christ