**2024 Homily Midnight**

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.

We find ourselves tonight moving from the great mystery of God’s presence with us in the Christ child ,through the great troubles of our world right down to the small acts of loving and local generosity that are the bedrock of living together in community.

How on earth do we contemplate the wonder and the glory of the Christmas story in such dark times, with our hearts so often weighed down by anxiety, sorrow, death ,destruction and fear?

There is war in many places across the world, even in the land where Christ was born, there are possible disasters and global environmental catastrophe on all our minds, there is poverty, persecution and oppression for so many people the future looks bleak.
As in the classical story, a whole Pandora’s box of miseries seem continually to plague us, the fear of potential future pandemics and diseases, fears of the implications of artificial intelligence, for work and well-being, fears of death and dying, fear in our churches that we have failed to protect the vulnerable from predatory exploitation and that we might still get it wrong in future, some of us are coping with abuse, some with chronic pain and illness, others with bereavement, the losses of loved friends and family, or with deep anxiety about their future or the still rising cost of living, or the fear of managing change.

In that same story of Pandora’s box right at the end in a corner there was also hope.
As Christians we called to live in hope, to look for signs of hope, to find hope and to share hope in our communities and in our lives together. Signs like the Earthshot prize winning pioneers, signs like the Foodbank volunteers and the gifts for the Starer Packs project, large and small shoots of hope, to share and to encourage others tojoin in..
We are not nearly ready for Christmas, on any level in practical terms, in spiritual terms, locally or globally, hope is in short supply, but God does not wait until we are ready, he comes to us now, and in that coming there is not only hope, but also great joy, he comes to be with us where we are, ready or not, hopeless and afraid, Emanuel, or God with us, loves us so much hecomes to us in the middle of it all, so we are not standing alone because he has gone before us, we are standing in his footprints and following on.

[**The Coming**](https://allpoetry.com/The-Coming) R S Thomas sums it up in his poem

And God held in his hand
A small globe.  Look he said.
The son looked.  Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour.  The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, A river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.
               On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky.  many People
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs.  The son watched
Them.  Let me go there, he said

Not only does he come to us, the priest and poet RS Thomas reminds us that he chooses to come to us, rather than to go somewhere else, because he has compassion, he sees our need for abundant life and for the perfect love that casts out fear - that love that sets us free us to hear and to share the good news, of his coming and of our salvation.
He knows how much help we need, and so he restores our hope by taking a risk, and coming among us as a vulnerable child.
The good news is that as he was made a man, so he knows our human life from within. Not in any sense is his coming a quick fix, nor the product of foolish unthinking optimism - he brings us real hope showing us by his life, teaching, death and resurrection, that ultimately life, goodness and light conquer death, evil and darkness. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it..
God’s good news, is new life as a baby. Now the birth of a baby is almost always good news for family and friends, but not usually for the whole world. It is the identity of this baby that makes his coming good news for all people. For this baby – Jesus – was announced by the angel as the Saviour, the Lord. This baby was none other than God himself coming into the world in human form to save it.
It is easy to get so carried away by the rather sentimental joy and enthusiasm of Christmas celebrations, that we forget how unrealistic our expectations might become, we hope for so much we are almost bound for disappointment
I was reminded only recently that many historic paintings of the Nativity set the Holy family amid ruins and desolate landscapes, a reminder, if we needed it, that we are starting again, a long journey of peacemaking, community building and rebuilding, of growth and spiritual understanding, and we are starting from a very low base.

Last Christmas we were given the powerful and distressing image of the child in the crib in the rubble of Gaza, and that war still continues, with women and children as particular victims, as in every war.

Here’s the thing we can so often overlook. The world hasn’t changed that much since that first Christmas night, Jesus was born into a world of conflict and injustice, just like ours. Yet human behaviour still shocks us by its awfulness, carelessness, brutality and cruelty
We still struggle for reconciliation, justice and peace in our own time, as in every generation before us, we learn a few new things, and we make a little progress knowing even as we do so, that all things will only be fully reconciled when Christ comes again in judgement and in mercy.

That should not stop us from trying to bring change, and proclaim the good news, welcoming this inspiring reminder of his first coming and singing with the angels, on this holy and joyful night “Glory to God in the highest, and on the earth peace, and good will.”

Because we are amongst those who walk in darkness and are seeking the light, Christ’s birth in Bethlehem celebrated every year, each time marks for us the beginning of a new hope and new stage in the journey of faith for all Christians, new and different a fresh hope for all of us ,each time we hear the story, from OT and from NT , from Isaiah
“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

And from Luke who tells us the message of the angel

“I bring you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.’

This is truly good news for all of us, for all of us here today, and for all time.

Alleluia ! Amen