

Sermon

'For the grace of God has appeared'

Christmas Day 2021



'For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.'

It is not every day that you see God.

God is not to be found in philosophical reflection on the created order. Nor is he found in intellectual moral reflection on that created order. Nor is he found in the power of Empire, of Augustus and Quirinius, of Trump and Andrews. In the decrees, in the false Messianic quest, of man.

God is revealed, in Jesus. Born of Mary, in the little town of Bethlehem. Today wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger, because there was no room for him in the inn.

Looked for by the prophets, he was heralded by the Baptist, announced by an angel, born of the virgin Mary, and revealed at last to men and women of every race.

Jesus is the Christ. The Messiah of God. The light that shines in the darkness. In him the new day has dawned in the world. In the face of Jesus Christ, the world is now lit with a strange, new light. That is the dawn light of the new day.

This dawning of the new day, this coming of God himself into his world at Christmas, to rule and to reign, in the hearts of men and women, throughout the world, in every time and place, is in fulfilment of God's promise, which he made to the world, through the prophet Isaiah, in the 8th century before Christ:

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.

You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,

the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

By the brightness of this light, by the dawning of the kingdom of God himself in this world, the darkness of this world, its power over us, simply fades into the background, to the point of disappearing.

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.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold his kingdom
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.

Such is the brightness of this light, such is its awesome, spiritual power, such is its authority, all who glimpse it, like Paul, are blinded by it. And ask with him, 'Lord, who are you?' To receive the reply, 'I am Jesus. Why do you persecute me?' And they give their life to the grasping, the proclamation, and the transfiguration of the world, in the light of the revelation that had received.

This dynamic changed the world. The truth about God, revealed in Christ, changed the world's calendar, to a before, and after. Changed the most powerful empire the world had ever seen, to follow Christianity. Inspired the creation of modern society, based on the freedom of the individual, in Christ. Continues to involve Christians everywhere, in a permanent revolution. As the dawn light of the kingdom of God, that shines into a dark world in the face of Jesus Christ, undercuts every claim, of the many false messiahs of this world. The emperor has no clothes. The power game, is over. Jesus is Lord. And the little kings of this world are not. For the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever.

For Martin Luther, human misery comes from the heart's turning inward. Human joy comes from an open.

For when meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.'

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The world change that came with Christ, was the turn, away from the age of the ultimate authority of the law, of the state, of emperors and premiers, to the age of grace, the age of God, the age of Christ, the Messiah of God.

A grace that is deeper, and wider, and stronger, and higher, than our eyes can see. That we must come to see, with our hearts. That we can only see with our hearts,

The birth of Jesus brings the world to its knees. Filling it with new light, with new hope, with peace.

In Jesus Christ, God calls us out of the darkness, into marvellous light.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury writes. 'There is an open door that exists in the heart of every situation - a way to peace and praise from any imaginable place. Jesus is there in our human experience. And so every place, can be changed.'

Wherever you have been in your life, wherever you have been this year, that is God's free offer to you today, in Jesus Christ. That is the love of God himself, a love letter, addressed to you. A Christmas card, with your personal name on it. That has the power to set you free. That has the power to show you who you truly are. That has the power to change your life. That has the power to give you peace. Peace with God. Peace with yourself. Peace with those around you. Peace that the world cannot give.

'I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world.' Jesus said.

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near; believe in the good news.' Jesus said.

'This is the message we have heard from Christ and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.' John said.

'The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it,' the Gospel of John proclaims.