

# Pointing to the Light in the Darkness

Christmas 2 (Year C) - 05.01.2025

Jeremiah 31.7-14 | Psalm 147.13-end | Ephesians 1.3-14 | John 1.1-18

## Reading

**1** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*** (John 1.1-18)

## Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.**

# Sermon

## I. The Darkness: Human Suffering and Despair in the Present

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is January 5, 2025. We are still within the liturgical Christmas season, on the second Sunday after Christmas. As we step into the new year, I, like many others, find myself wondering what it will bring. It's no coincidence that year-end reviews and predictions for the future are so common at this time of year. They arise from key questions: What were the most significant events of the past year? Under what conditions are we starting this new year? And how will it unfold?

Let's briefly reflect on 2024: Last year Japan became the fifth nation to land softly on the Moon. Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny tragically passed away under mysterious circumstances at the age of 47. Sweden joined NATO as its 32nd member, while Iran retaliated against Israel following an Israeli bombing. Former President Trump was shot and injured, and Central Europe experienced devastating floods. The Republicans won the US elections in November, Notre Dame reopened, and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad fled to Moscow.

This list offers just a glimpse of the year's events—chaotic, often unsettling, and at times offering sparks of hope. Many conflicts and challenges from last year, such as the war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unrest in Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Sudan, and the ongoing climate crisis, will carry over into 2025. Despite moments of light, darkness and despair continue to dominate our world.

## II. Our Christmas Celebrations in the Midst of Darkness and Despair

Looking back on the Christmas markets, the festive decorations, and the New Year's celebrations in major cities like London and Paris, I find myself wondering how the joy of these events aligns with the harsh realities of a world in despair. At Christmas, we often seek out moments of joy and togetherness—laughter, dancing, festive attire, good food,

generous gift-giving, and a fair amount of waste in the form of gift wrapping. It's a time for celebration, and I hope you enjoyed these moments with loved ones as much as I did.

But sometimes, especially at Christmas, disruptions occur. Quarrels break out in families, shattering the festive atmosphere. We see homeless people on the streets, reminding us that not everyone shares in the holiday cheer. Last year, an attack on a Christmas market in Magdeburg, Germany, left many dead or seriously injured. In the aftermath, the people of Magdeburg, still reeling from this tragedy, were left questioning how to celebrate in the wake of such horror. Can Christmas still be celebrated in the face of violence and suffering?

It's understandable to feel conflicted after such tragic events. How can we find joy when faced with the reality of pain, like the recent plane crash in South Korea?

### **III. Pointing to Christ as the Light in the Darkness**

In the midst of all this sorrow and uncertainty, today's Gospel offers us a perspective on Christmas that reminds us of its deeper significance.

The first chapter of the Gospel of John provides a lens through which we can understand God's relationship with creation. The great American preacher Billy Graham once suggested that a general Bible study should begin with this chapter.

John speaks of Christ, the light of the world, who has been with God from the beginning and through whom all things were made. John the Baptist, God's messenger, pointed to Christ, the light shining in the darkness. Though the world did not recognise Him, those who received Jesus were given the right to become children of God. The eternal Word became flesh, and through Jesus, God established an intimate relationship with His creation.

This message points to the heart of our Christian hope: Even though this world is often dark, filled with suffering and injustice, God loves His creation. Therefore, He came to us in the person of Jesus Christ, experiencing the world's rejection and injustice, even dying on the cross, to reconcile us with God.

John, the Gospel reminds us, is not the light himself but merely points to it. This distinction was likely influenced by early disputes between followers of Jesus and John. The Gospel emphasises the importance of the substance over the symbol, a truth that also applies to our Christmas traditions.

Let me give you an example: A friend once shared that she associates Christmas only with food and presents. From that view, Christmas becomes nothing more than a holiday of consumption, offering no guidance or comfort during times of crisis, like the tragedies in Magdeburg or South Korea.

But for Christians, Christmas is more than pleasure; it is a remembrance of God's incarnation—His journey to restore peace and justice through Jesus. In Jesus, God humbly knocks on the door of our hearts, offering us the gift of reconciliation with Him.

Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, a new future has begun—a future not shaped by the violent and powerful, but by God, who made Himself powerless and small for our sake.

#### **IV. The Mission of the Church: Proclaiming Reconciliation through Word and Deed**

Similarly, the Church's role is not to celebrate for its own sake but to proclaim God's reconciliation with His creation. Our mission, as outlined in the Christ Church mission statement revised by the Church Council last year, clarifies what this means for us.

As a congregation, we aim to provide a welcoming and compassionate spiritual home for all, celebrating diversity and inviting people from all walks of life to worship God, grow as Christians, and participate in His mission of reconciliation. Our goals include fostering community life, connecting through worship, education, and social events; reaching out to younger generations; cultivating a culture of stewardship; serving through charitable acts; and integrating environmental concerns into our worship and action.

## V. John the Baptist as a Symbol of the Church

With our words and deeds, we, as a community, point to Christ, the light of the world. A famous altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald in Colmar, France—the Isenheim Altarpiece—illustrates this well. In the centre is a crucified Christ, suffering from death and disease. Below Him stands John the Baptist, with a small lamb at His feet. Holding an open Bible in one hand, John points to Christ with his other. Notably, his index finger is unnaturally long. This altarpiece was created for those suffering from illness, encouraging them to find hope in Christ's suffering.

The renowned theologian Karl Barth saw the long finger of John in this altarpiece as a symbol of the Church, whose task is to point to Christ as the light of the world, bearing witness to the hope He brings.

As the Church and as Christians, we have every reason to believe that God's creation has a future. This hope is at the heart of Christmas. While we cannot know exactly what the future holds, one thing is certain for 2025: God extends His loving and reconciling hand to us through Jesus Christ, particularly in the dark days of the coming year.

Amen.

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## Summary

*In the media, we are constantly confronted with images of human suffering and despair, even during Christmas. Yet, at the same time, Christmas is a time when we gather with our families, often indulging in food and drink, exchanging gifts, and sharing moments of joy and laughter. How do these two contrasting experiences fit together?*

*For us as Christians, our celebrations are not ends in themselves. Rather, they testify to the hope that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a new era has begun—one in which death and suffering no longer hold the final say. In Jesus, God Himself comes to offer us reconciliation.*

*As a church, we are a community of believers with the mission to proclaim this message of reconciliation through both word and deed. Like John the Baptist, we are not the light ourselves, but we are called to point to Christ, the true light that shines in the darkness of this world.*

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