

**First Sunday after Christmas 2020**  
**December 27, 2020**

Merry Christmas! I hope the start to the Christmas season brought you moments of peace, moments of delight, and moments of joy. As a reminder, it is still Christmas, and I will wish people a Happy Christmas right up until the Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup> – so let's celebrate every bit of the festive season! So Merry Christmas!

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
*And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.*

Let's pray this together.

*Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Lord be with you.  
*And also with you.*

Let us now pray together the collect of the day.

*Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

***First Lesson***

**Isaiah 61:10-62:3**

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,

so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,

until her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
and her salvation like a burning torch.

The nations shall see your vindication,  
and all the kings your glory;

and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

### **The Response**

#### **Psalm 147 or 147:13-21**

[1 Hallelujah!  
How good it is to sing praises to our God!  
how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

2 The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem;  
he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.

4 He counts the number of the stars  
and calls them all by their names.

5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power;  
there is no limit to his wisdom.

6 The Lord lifts up the lowly,  
but casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;  
make music to our God upon the harp.

8 He covers the heavens with clouds  
and prepares rain for the earth;

9 He makes grass to grow upon the mountains  
and green plants to serve mankind.

10 He provides food for flocks and herds  
and for the young ravens when they cry.

11 He is not impressed by the might of a horse;  
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

12 But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who await his gracious favor.]

13 Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem;  
praise your God, O Zion;

14 For he has strengthened the bars of your gates;  
he has blessed your children within you.

15 He has established peace on your borders;  
he satisfies you with the finest wheat.

16 He sends out his command to the earth,  
and his word runs very swiftly.

17 He gives snow like wool;  
he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.

18 He scatters his hail like bread crumbs;  
who can stand against his cold?

19 He sends forth his word and melts them;  
he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.

20 He declares his word to Jacob,  
his statutes and his judgments to Israel.

21 He has not done so to any other nation;  
to them he has not revealed his judgments.  
Hallelujah!

## **The Epistle**

### **Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7**

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John.  
*Glory to you Lord Christ.*

### **John 1:1-18**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

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. (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.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

*Praise to you Lord Christ.*

### **A Reflection**

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

The first thing I'd like to do this morning is to give everyone a chance to catch their breath. Been a kind of crazy stretch of time, hasn't it? Do it again, deep breath, and enjoy this moment while you can. It's been busy, and we are just getting started.

I thought for a bit when considering this Gospel how appropriate this one is for this time we are in. We are on the crest of a new year (a fact which will lead many to breathe a sigh of relief!) It's a new year, and we hope to emerge from the darkness of the past year. It's also a new time in your relationship with God as well as with each other, and today we are offered "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

In the beginning was the word. We are in the beginning now – what's your word? Every day is a beginning, really – what's your first thought or word to enter this new time? What note would you like to begin this new year on? What note, what tone, what message would you like to carry in your heart into the new year? Let's see – love – trust – compassion – I suggest keeping it simple and direct. Sharing – healing may be a good word for now - Love keeps coming up for me. The Gospel offers that the word was with God, and the word is God. Was the word you chose "with" God? Maybe the word actually *is* God, like it says – not a bad place to start the year!

There is great strength in words. Just as a word can help, a word can also send you spinning off in a dark direction, so consider the words you carry in your heart of mind with care.

The Gospel continues with more words – “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” Maybe the word is God, especially if all things came into being through God. What would you like to have come into being this year?

Maybe God is the word to start with, or possibly the word Light, as the Gospel continues, “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” But what has come into being is life – and we are told this light and life can be the same.

There is strength in light, and there is strength in life. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” So we see that the darkness wants to overcome life and light, but it *can't*.

“Life was the light of all people.” We walk with God, we walk with light and life, and the darkness will not overcome us. Let's be clear, though - this does not make the darkness gone – it's still out there. We have all experienced it in different ways and at different times. It is up to us to decide how we bring the light. We have been provided with a number of tools to bring light into the darkness.

Think for a moment about times of darkness in your life. Where did the light come in for you? How has it come to you in the past few months? Think about a time you have known of someone else in darkness. Did you bring them light? If we can believe, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it,” then we know that darkness is not and cannot be permanent.

It all constantly changes, even as the seasons do. In today's world where it seems to get dark enough to be bedtime at about lunchtime – we still know the light will return - maybe not all at once, but it inevitably gets there, and now that return of the light has begun. How has it begun? Maybe as simple as being past the Solstice, and now the days begin to get longer. Maybe as involved as the presence of the injection for the virus (let's pray that helps remove the darkness we have seen). We see again, and again the light returns, maybe not all at once, but it inevitably gets there!

We read, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

John came to testify to the light – he knows the light is there, he knows it is coming, and in testifying to it, helps spread that light to a world not knowing what is coming.

Jesus was born “not of the blood and will of the flesh” but born of God. “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” This life was light to the people, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.” The light took

life in the word through our Lord Jesus Christ – and now lives in the world through us, who carry Christ’s light in our own hearts into the world.

The light lives in us as we go through our day – through our work – through the people we meet and contact day today. The way we live and move and share this light is, in the end, up to us.

The Gospel of Matthew offers, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

But at the same time, it is up to us. If you want to keep it under a bowl, feel free - but in my opinion, you will find the light does not give you much benefit that way either. Don't want to share it? Then don't – the choice is yours. A candle alone still keeps out the darkness, but that light becomes very lonely for more life and light!

But how glorious is the life of the light of many candles all together! Remember how the sanctuary looks with everyone's candles lit on Christmas Eve as we sing "Silent Night" (and it will look that way again!) That was the light we speak of today. The light we are meant to share and carry in our hearts – carry in our hearts to share with others whose candles may have sputtered and fizzled a bit. To share with others who may be in darkness of their own. To light the way for those who have lost their way. And if you lose your way in the dark, reach out to someone with a candle – they will help.

Maybe light will be my word for this new year – and I wish you a new year of carrying that light always, being a light for yourself, and sharing that light with others on the path.

*Amen.*

Let us now confess our sins against God and our neighbor, praying together.

*Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Let us end by praying as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Pray this as you will, out loud or to yourself – just know that God hears you.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

We will continue with the prayer of Spiritual Communion. This prayer was written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori. This prayer is now often used when the church is in a place of fasting from Communion, and I have heard this used in many of the on-line services being offered. We will be using this prayer in place of Communion as we work on regathering, too.

*Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.*

In Galatians today, we read, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."

Christ is born. The Lord is present. Let us say, Hallelujah!

Happy Christmas to you and yours!

Yours in Christ,  
Dave+