

Christmas - A
Isaiah 9:1-6;
Titus 2:11-14;
Luke 2:1-14
Little Flower - 12/25/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all of you a most blessed and joyful Christmas. In a special way, we want to welcome all of our visitors, especially those who are returning home to Little Flower to celebrate this Christmas Liturgy with us today.

Several centuries before Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing.”* In John’s Gospel, Jesus himself would say, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* [8:12].

It seems to me that as human beings, we spend our whole lives trying to make sense of our lives and our experiences. It is in the light of Jesus that our lives and experiences make sense. In other words, Jesus gives meaning to our lives. Because he is both divine and human, he not only reveals God to us but also reveals us to ourselves. We often sing the hymn *Center of My Life*. If we make Jesus the center of our lives, everything begins to make sense and fall into place. Since his election, Pope Francis has stressed that what is ultimately important is our encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, our relationship with Christ. When we have a personal relationship with Christ, the light of the world and the light of our lives, we have abundant joy and great rejoicing.

Also, if we think of our life as a journey, Jesus enlightens the way for us. His teaching and example show us the path to fulness of life. As Paul wrote to Titus, *“The grace of God [Jesus] has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age”* until Christ returns in glory.

In today’s Gospel, we see the first missionary outreach after the birth of Christ in the announcement of the angel to the shepherds. The angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds *“and the glory of the Lord shone around them....The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.’”* If Christ is the one true light of the world, he can only shine as brightly as we are willing to be Christian lights to the world. Our relationship with Jesus, our faith in Jesus, cannot simply be for ourselves. As the angel did for the shepherds, all of us are called to bring Christ into the lives of others in order to bring others to Christ. We can only do this if we are joyful, optimistic, and life giving as individuals and as a community.

My brothers and sisters, Christmas is a time of celebration. Tonight and tomorrow we will celebrate with family and friends. It is important, however, that we not forget why we are celebrating. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the one true light of the world, who gives meaning to our lives and shows us the path to life but who also calls us to be lights to the world, to bring Christ to others and others to Christ.

Oh, what a gift,
What a wonderful gift;
Who can tell the wonders of the Lord?
Let us open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts;
It is Christ the Lord; it is he!¹

¹Pat Uhl & Michael Gilligan, “Canticle of the Gift,” *The Johannine Hymnal*, (Oak Park, Illinois: American Catholic Press, 1970).