

Msgr. Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on December 25, 2011
Liturgical Year B
Christmas

We all know about darkness. Remember the last time the power went off in your home? You groped around in the darkness looking for matches, perhaps, and a candle. Those shepherds in the Judean hills know what darkness was. It was lighted only by the moon and stars, and perhaps by a warming fire. Christmas comes at the darkest time of the year, the Winter Solstice.

Yet darkness can come in other shapes and forms. Loneliness is dark. Pain and grief are dark. Confusion and heartache are dark. Many of you are familiar with the term seasonal affective disorder – SAD. Periods of dark can breed depression, melancholy, sadness.

Imagine then how startled those shepherds were. We're told the glory of the Lord shone on them. The people who dwelt in the darkness have seen a great light. It must have seemed like an alien invasion. Luke, our Christmas gospel writer, tells us the shepherds were terrified.

Jesus brings light to us at Christmas. We light candles and put lights on the trees and wreaths. But Jesus brings a different kind of light. It dazzles our minds and calms our hearts. Later on, Jesus will say of himself, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

It is in the darkest part of the night that the light of Christ appears. When the world needed him most, Christ came, God in human flesh. It's also true for us. When life is at its darkest and most dismal point, the light of Christ can shine.

Once there was a wise rabbi who asked his students, his disciples, this question: "How do you know when the darkness is gone, when the dawn's light has arrived?" One answered, "When in the distance you can tell the difference between a cow and a deer." "Close," the rabbi said. Another tried, "When on the trees you can tell a peach blossom from an apple blossom." "Not bad, not bad," the rabbi said. "But here's the answer: when you can look on the face of any man, woman or child you see and know immediately that this is a child of God and a brother or sister to you, then you know darkness is overcome and the Daystar from on high is rising on us."

Jesus comes at Christmas as light in darkness. But Christmas light shines on every time we recognize Christ in the friend or the stranger. God grant you the light of Christmas: it is faith. God grant you the warmth of Christmas: it is love. God grant you the good news of Christmas: it is truth. God give you the all of Christmas: He is Christ the Lord.

A blessed Christmas to us all.