

I received a Christmas card this year with a stable scene and Mary in the middle of it holding her baby. It was an old oil painting by some great master. In the darkness of the stable all the light seems to be coming from Jesus, the radiant child!

When I was about 8 years old my family moved and I entered my 5th new school midway through the year. I still have a very vivid memory from that time. I was following the class of children through a long uphill tunnel. I was the last kid and a long way behind. The floor was uneven and strewn with rocks. Up ahead, at the front of the other children was the teacher and he had a light. I had to make my way forward remembering what I had seen yesterday, because that was where I was stumbling in the gloom now. And I had to watch what his light showed now, so I could remember it for tomorrow.

At a parent-teacher evening he told my parents, "I think there is more in David than is coming out." My teacher's name was Mr. Right! By the end of that year I was walking near the front, in the light. Oh! It was so much better.

I was a person living in great darkness. Upon me a light shined, and helped me to find my way to it. I became a person of light in that class. But the light never stood still. The light was always moving, changing, showing what new truth mattered, what could be seen, learned, understood and acted upon. It was always up to me to move into the light again and again.

All those images of light, darkness, the fear of always being behind in the dark, and the relief and joy of being up with the light, all of these were my images, well before I knew a thing about Christian faith. Our language of faith is way deeper than cute Christmas cards.

There are a lot of people here tonight. I know a number of faces and there are a lot of faces I don't know. This is my first Christmas at this Church of the Redeemer. Maybe you are here every year or, like me, this is a first. Perhaps both. You have been here often, but it is different tonight. You are hearing it, or feeling it differently.

Tonight there is someone here for whom this is the beginning, this is a first glimpse of what this light is, or could be, or might be.

This "light of Christ" might feel in you like a direct gift from God. Not via my words, or via theology or doctrine or some religious craziness. No. For you tonight, whoever you are in this crowd, this is God's gift to you. Just as God, in hindsight, gave me the light I needed when I was 8, a new kid, alone and lost. The light you can feel inside you, faint, small, but maybe just enough, this is just for you. It is a light that makes you know, deep inside, that you, tonight, are loved. You are seen, known, loved and cared for. You have been recognized, blessed and given just enough.

No one will know it is you. Just Jesus!

As the service unfolds we get to communion. Whoever you are, first time or thinking you might never come again, I want you to know that you are welcome to come and receive.

A morsel of hand-made bread will be put into your hand. Lift it, receive it, taste its deep flavour and texture. Then the wine will come to you. Bring the chalice to your lips and sip the deep, unexpected taste that changes your mouth. Taste and feel the way it moves and changes in you. Let this be like a touch from God, even a gentle kiss. It is a fragment, this gift, of the love, rich and deep, God has for you.

We say words like, “The body of Christ, given for you” and “The blood of Christ, shed for you”. It is God giving you a piece of divinity. It is a gift for hope, for courage, for purpose and direction, for healing and for joy. It is, really, just a gift of true love.

In the 40 years I have been following along in that light of Christ, the light has never stood still. God’s face and style changes as soon as I think I’ve got it! To be with God is to be travelling inside, spiritually, and in the way you express that in your life. Like Mr. Right, who every day brought something new to teach, something we didn’t even know was there to learn, the divine is always saying, “But look! Have you seen? I have more for you!”

May this Christmas service be a moment of light and blessing for you!
May it be an opening of your eyes, of your heart, of your life.

To you all I say, A blessed and a merry Christmas!