

Second Sunday of Christmas-January 3, 1999

Jeremiah 31:7-14 Psalm 147:13-21 Ephesians 1:3-14 John 1:1-18

Today is the Tenth Day of Christmas. We are still near the day which had the longest night. Until the Winter Solstice, it seemed as if the night would swallow up the day altogether, that complete and utter darkness would engulf our world, and an end would come to all life. Primitive people still feared the days when they noticed that the sun was setting earlier and earlier on the horizon. They did not know what we now know: it has to do with the angle that the axis of our little planet Earth is tilted on, and how far North the rays of the sun strike the earth and how far South. Now the sun is way down to the South and the longest days are occurring in the southern hemisphere. When the sun crosses the equator, we have the equinoxes, i.e., the equal days and equal nights.

We do not know the time of the year when Christ was really born, of course. But we do know that he came to bring the light which no darkness can overcome. Thus it was very appropriate to set the time of the Christ child's birth right at that time in the calendar when the heavens themselves give testimony to God, the invincible Light of the World; precisely at the time when the darkness of the Winter Solstice is overcome, and the long nights shorten once more, and the light of God starts shining brighter, penetrating us with more light and warmth. Then all life recovers, and the earth puts on a new green dress, as all the vegetation flourishes again. Plants blossom and flowers bloom. And then the animals recover as well, build nests, and multiply: all the little ones are born.

Obviously our lives depend upon the sun. On a physical level, it is the source of our lives. The other day we took our relatives up to Mount Tamalpais (the name means "sleeping woman" in an Indian language), and the sun was beginning to set when we

came down the winding road. When we started along the ocean toward the Golden Gate Bridge, we pulled over to watch the sunset. It was spectacular. And it is possible to see sun rises over the ocean as well. I remember them from the East Coast, driving along the Belt in New York, gold, silver, brilliantly sparkling colors of light. What a glory to behold!

On Christmas we consider another "Son rise." The Son of God is being born: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. When we speak of Mary and Joseph, their trip to Bethlehem, and the birth of the Christ child, and the little one lying in a manger, we are speaking of a spectacular son-rise. This child was born in a very special way from God: that same God whose finger placed the sun we see in our sky, the star our little planet belongs to, 93,000,000 miles away; that hot ball of fire at precisely the right distance away to nurture the life we here enjoy; that God in whom this whole universe holds together; that God who is smaller than the sub-atomic particles, who also unifies the four kinds of energies of physics; that God took on human form, became flesh. The word "flesh" here means "human being." God became a human being. God became one of us. *Cur Deus homo?* Why did God become human? The love of God brought him down!

There is light and there is light. God's light is the light in which we see light. The light of the Son of God is the light that knew how to put this whole creation together, and how to continue to create it, and to save it from where it is getting lost. The scientists work and struggle to unlock the secrets of the universe, of nature, of human society, and although they have discovered more than I will ever know, they have hardly scratched the surface of what God had to know to put this universe together, who made, who created it all.

That light is far brighter than the light of the sun. The

light of God sent Gabriel to Mary to tell her she would conceive by the Holy Spirit in her womb, and the Son of God, Jesus, would be born from her, and he would come to us and be with us. Jesus was born to show us the way of life, born to be our life, and usher in the light that no darkness could overcome.

The sun that rises and sets on our horizon certainly gives us light, warmth, and life. For Christmas, however, we are speaking about the birth of the light in which we see light. Teilhard de Chardin spoke of the birth of life from the inorganic realm, the birth of thought from life, and the birth of love from thought. Here we are speaking of the birth of the Most High, the one who brings life, who fills us with grace and truth, and floods the world with the spiritual warmth of the Love of God to begin a spiritual springtime amongst us, in which the sweet children of God are born. The children of God are sweeter than any kitten, puppy, chick, gosling, kid, lamb, or what have you.

These holy births are possible because of the life of the Christ child born of our mother Mary. This wonderful light fills us and renews us in such a way that it gives us a new birth in the love of God, which no darkness can overcome.

Contrary to what you might expect, the darkness cannot be disbursed by our sunlight. In the words of Isaiah: a thick darkness covers the earth,<sup>1</sup> and it is undiminished by spectacular sunsets and sunrises, by earthly spring times, even by warm and hot summers. They cannot drive it away.

Examples of this darkness come to mind too easily:

A mother gives birth to her child in the hospital, and watches on TV how her six other children die in a fire at her mother's, the children's grandmother's, house. Thick darkness

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<sup>1</sup>Isaiah 60:2.

covers the earth.

A fellow high on drugs drives a hundred miles per hour weaving in and out of freeway traffic. Meanwhile he is shining a laser pen light into the eyes of the drivers of the cars he's passing. He hits a pick up truck, which slams into another car. The result: four teenagers die. He does not stop, making it a hit and run accident. When the police appear at his door to arrest him, he jumps out of the window. Thick darkness covers the earth.

You may have read in the news papers about the Pol Pot defections in Cambodia. The United States and other western powers would like to see the two leaders who have defected brought to justice. Well we might, because between 1975 and 1979 the Pol Pot regime killed over 1,000,000 people there in the "Killing Fields." But the leader of Cambodia has noted that the United States should also be accused for raining bombs down on Cambodia for 200 days and 200 nights in 1969. What did that do to the psychology of that little country? Did it have something to do with the trauma, the suicidal genocide that followed?

A thick darkness did not only cover Pol Pot's Cambodia, but also this place we call home, our own country. Thick darkness has rolled over us as well.

Look at what is happening in Africa. Fifty percent of some populations have aids, and they are dying in droves, yet they cannot speak openly about sex and death. How will we come to grips with that modern day plague ravaging the people there, while one country after another gets sucked into civil wars and rebellions.

Look at the Hutus. They were capable of killing a half a million Tutus with clubs and machetes: men, women, and children. I think they consciously imitated Hitler, because they also spoke of a "final solution." There were six million Jews in Germany.

Hitler's final solution was to murder them all. There are 31 million Hutus governed by six million Tutus. Their final solution: kill all the Tutus and we will be able to govern ourselves.

Thick, thick darkness covers the earth. And make no mistake. That darkness is here amongst us, too, and it is so thick we can hardly see anything. And if you are not convinced, it would be easy to bring up the darkness that hangs over families in which there is drug or alcohol abuse, or where the wife submits to regular domestic violence. How thick the darkness when the children are being sexually abused by their own parents!

Let the light of the world come! Over the flickering wick, Jesus will cup his hand and protect the flame so it grows in strength and burns brightly once more. A bruised reed he will not break. The stem of the plant he will mend and strengthen, so that it will not bend over, snap, and die. The flame will recover. Christ will not let the candle go out. The plant will also heal, gain new strength and live!

Christ is born! Hallelujah! The spring time of the children of God is about to begin. That's because Christ was born for us. His holy birth will become our new birth, because it was for us he was born. The people filled by the Holy Spirit will replenish the earth.

Come see the Son of God. Let there be room in your heart for the baby Jesus. Come into the baby's presence. There in the glory of the Christ child's presence there is the fulness of grace and truth. See what the Love of God has begotten in Mary, the champion of faith. "Let the Holy Spirit make me pregnant." she said, if you permit me to say it in our words. "Let the Holy Spirit conceive the Son of God even in my womb." "Let it happen

to me even according to God's Word." <sup>2</sup>

We have been saying "Merry Christmas!" to each other, and "Happy New Year!" What does it mean? What does it really mean? We reach out for the Christmas season. We are slightly more charitable and sharing. Monday rolls around, the New Year passes, and it's back to the old grind. The Christmas "season" is over! In our envy of the greediest, the neediest are soon forgotten.

But the Light that enlightens everyone has come to dwell with us. This Son-rise lights the light that brings a spring time no winter can overcome. "It makes a rose bloom in the midst of a cold dark winter." to allude to the famous carol. It brings rebirth to the children of light, who disburse the darkness that no natural sunlight can drive away. The light has come. The light no darkness can overcome! Rise and shine for the glory of the Lord is round about us. Aren't you 'fraid? Aren't you amazed? Won't you rejoice?

Evil, murder, violence, sin, death, and the devil are banished. Now God is doing a new thing. Away with sin! Christ is with us. God is with us - Immanuel! AMEN!

Peter Krey

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<sup>2</sup>Bernard of Clairvaux writes that the word of God becomes "clothed in flesh" through Mary uniquely, and is not just "clothed with air," like the words we hear. He has many interesting ideas in his "Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary." For example: "And it is known that the word of the Lord was put into the ear of some, into the mouth of others, and even into the hands of a few. But I ask that it be to me in my womb according to your word." Bernard interprets Mary's request in this way. M. Basil Pennington, ed. Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Spiritual Writings, (Hyde Park, New York: the New City Press, 1997), p. 29 and p. 30.