

Afraid of the Dark?

Christmas 2 - 3rd January 2010

Readings:

John 1: 1-18

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it... the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world.”

Did you noticed just before Christmas just how much nictophobia there was about. And how now just after New Year it all seems to have disappeared. I mean before Christmas it was everywhere. They’ve even made a movie about it! You know what I mean, don’t you? Anyone help me?

Of course nictophobia - fear of the dark. And it manifested itself clearly in the weeks leading up to Christmas - with all the lights. They were everywhere. Newspapers and radio & TV stations made sure you couldn’t miss them. Who went on a lights tour before Christmas? Who went to the bright fireworks on New Year’s Eve? I even have this little halo to ward off the dark!

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it... the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world.”

Trouble is, I don’t think these were the kind of lights that John was going on about in our gospel reading this morning. I am yet to work out what all those winter wonderland scenes that you see in peoples’ yards have to do with our Christmas, especially in 30° heat! And then there are all those Disneyland characters traipsing over front yards and the santas balancing precariously on rooftops. Very spectacular but it’s all gone a little far from Bethlehem and a lowly stable, hasn’t it?

The sad thing about our nation’s preoccupation with Christmas lights is that by this time each year, the lights are packed away. And life goes on as if the Christ child was never born.

And it’s ironic in the extreme that the day allotted to take down our Christmas decorations, is the 6th of January, the day of Epiphany, or as the Greek Orthodox church would have it, the Day of Holy Lights!

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Epiphany means manifestation or sightings of God and the period leading up to Lent this year has readings all concerning such sightings.

Sadly in our nation the bright lights more often than not drown out the true light of the Christ child. We are so used to artificial light, that we take the true light for granted. Darkness doesn’t seem to hold the same fear in us, for all we need is a night light or fairy lights to distract us, to comfort us. We trivialize darkness, pretending that everything is all

right in the artificial light of our cities. Especially at Christmas. And when the Christmas lights go away, for many, the darkness takes over.

That's why on Christmas Eve we lit candles sprung from the newly born Christ candle in this darkened church, symbolically to take the Christ light into the dark night. Our individual lights making a difference in our own dark neighbourhood. That's why last Wednesday night at a Peace Prayer Vigil for those marching into Gaza, we lit the same candles sprung again from the Christ candle, and offered them up as our prayers for a dark world. Our symbolic actions firmly grounded in the true Light that enlightens the world.

And that's the trouble with our Christmas lights. For many they have lost their power. There is no connection to the One that put to flight the darkness. They are a long way from the Christ child. A long way from Christ way of love and peace. There are no epiphanies, no sightings of the Christ light and the darkness for so many persists. If we are to see the full effect of the Christ child coming into the world then we need to be connected to the Christ light.

Sixteen years ago on the 6th January 1994, Epiphany, the day of Light, the Cape Otway lighthouse was decommissioned. It went automatic and the humans involved in maintaining the light, were no longer needed. Lighthouse buffs will tell you that, with the passing of manned lighthouses, the lighthouses of Australia have lost their souls.

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And perhaps that's what's happening to Christmas. Our society has gone automatic, we have removed ourselves from the true source of the light, the Christ child. So up go the lights in early December and down they come in early January. It's up to us to ensure that Christmas will never go automatic and that Epiphanies, sighting of God will continue all year round in our reflected Christ light.

Let me close with a Jewish midrash. Midrash is a kind of commentary that the learned rabbis of old would make on a piece of Scripture. In this case the Scripture is from Psalm 36:9.

"Be our Redeemer Lord" in A Worship Anthology for Christmas.

Rabbi Yochanan in the 1st Century AD said this:

"A man was walking on a road at night and his lantern went out. He relit it but it went out again. Finally he said to himself, "Why should I bother with a lantern? I will sit down by the roadside, and when the sunlight arrives I will continue my journey."

By the same token the Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, and Moses led them forth; they were enslaved in Babylon, and Zerubbabel led them forth; they were enslaved in Persia and Mordecai led them forth; they were enslaved in Greece, and the Maccabees freed them. When they were enslaved once more by Rome, they said: "O Lord, free us no longer by the intervention of man, we are weary of the succession of enslavement. Be you our Redeemer, Lord, not a mortal man. Let not man lighten us, but lighten us yourself, as it is written: with you is the fountain of Life, and in your Light do we see light." (Psalm 36:9)

Pilgrim Uniting Church
Rev. Tony Duncan - Sermon

-- And the Gospel writer John, writing at the same time as Yochanan, says: **“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it... the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world.”**

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3rd January 2010
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