

A Reflection for the Carol Services at Grantchester & Newnham, December 20th 2020, by the Revd Andrew Hurst, Curate

Light in the darkness

We can probably all look back and remember a long night. A night when the darkness seemed to go on for ever. A night of sapping fatigue. A night of anxiety.. There are Hospital nights, or Airport nights, or journeying nights, or sitting up waiting by the phone nights.

I don't know if it is just an urban myth but I read somewhere once that more babies are born at night than during the day - maybe they feel safer - or maybe they know its easier to park the car at 1.00 a.m. - but there it is. Hospital nights.

Long nights. And there are long nights perhaps of parties, of music and dancing, moonlight and shivery dawns.

But for the long nights, there comes the time when someone, looking out of the Hospital window, or the car window, or the gap in the curtains, or at the light on the tent, says the magic words - "It's getting light."

This light. This light that calls us out of the darkness. This light that is so fundamental. The light that creeps up through the dawn, over the ridge on a hillside, the reddening sky in the east. This light, and the night is over.

It is a liminal moment - a time of thresholds. The colours of dawn are not the colours of day: there is the pale grey light of dawn, or the rose tint in the eastern sky; there is an aquamarine that we see at no other time; and the light is pellucid - we can see through it. It is a threshold time, a liminal time when the dark shapes take on their form, when the light seeps through the dark spaces and what we could not see we now see was always there - always there through the long, dark night.

Christmas is a luminal time - a time when the world stops and seems to be allowed to hold its breath. It is that threshold in time and space when we can dare to dream the encounter with divinity. We come close to touching God. Much as we might despair of the commercialisation of Christmas - all those Christmases that claim to be what Christmas is all about and have lost, forgotten or ignored what Christmas is all about - the fact is that the wholesale embrace by the secular world of Christmas gives us the space to pause and be in Christmas in a way we might not be able to manage otherwise. And it is a time, this time of encounter, when people yearn too for some unfathomable reason, yearn too to encounter the divine, touch the divine, in music, fellowship, carol, candlelight - in light in the darkness. We find the space and time to be in the liminal world of the birth of Jesus, God among us, Son of God, Prince of Peace, Jesus who is to become Christ, to become the love that saves the world from itself.

And this is the light of the world, the light that no darkness can ever put out. In our carols and our candlelight, in our Gospel readings that tell the old story every year anew, we really

feel, and see the light of the world, the light that shines out and touches us in our imperfect world, the light that shines out from the divine, from the only perfect world, and from perfect love. It is the tingle inside, it is the solo singing voice, it is the flicker of candlelight in the darkness, and it resounds through the great, majestic declaration of the beginning of that most tender of Gospels, the Gospel of John that we shall shortly hear once more anew.

Collectively, this year, much seems very dark. Our candlelight in the darkness takes on a greater significance. But there is always darkness, and for some of us or for those we know and who are dear to us, restrictions on our movement or society are the very least of our problems or our griefs. So it is that we never stop struggling for good; but the light of the love of God is always there, is always there for good - will always be there, has always been there - because nothing, nothing can defeat it; it will not, has not and never will be defeated by even the darkest of nights. It is sure as the sun that will rise in the morning after the longest and darkest of nights. It is there in the magical words: "it's getting light".

This is the light of the love of Christ - and may that light, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit shine in your homes and your lives and for those you love and cherish and deep in your hearts and this Christmas.

Happy Christmas!