



THE LIGHT IN THE DARKENED WORLD

As I pondered what my Christmas will look like this year, I began to imagine that first Christmas my parents would have had in 1949 far away from home in what was then Malaya. My father had gone there to establish himself and save enough money for his future bride's sea fare from Scotland to what is now known as Malaysia. Their wedding, on 17 December, was a moment for them to affirm their trust in God and each other. No family was present in person, yet they were united with them in thought and prayer. Seventy-one years later, my mother continues to remember that love, and like so many, has those memories to console her and the hope of new ones to come. That first Christmas of my parents, like for so many couples at that time and likewise for Mary and Joseph on that first Christmas, was a time to be grateful for each other. There were no special gifts, no large gatherings, or trees. All they had was each other.

In his recent Wednesday audience Pope Francis said: "This year restrictions and hardships await us. Let us think of the Christmas of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph: there were no roses, no flowers! How many difficulties they had! How many worries. Yet, faith, hope and love sustained them. May it be so for us." Like Mary and Joseph, we have experienced so many challenges this past year which no one could ever have imagined. However, it has also allowed new forms of communication and seen countless women and men, young and old, strive to make the lives of others easier. So many do this without fanfare and often at risk to themselves. Like Mary and Joseph, they trust. As dark as some of these days have been, it is all those many unseen acts of love and kindness, the many secret and faith-filled prayers raised to heaven, that we can all be grateful for.

Christmas still has a special call for us despite the restrictions on how we can worship and where we celebrate the birthday of Jesus. We will do so with that same excitement of the Shepherds in the fields, that same tug which draws us to worship and give thanks to the Christ child. Many of us are missing that familiar connection to parish life to which we are accustomed. Even so, at Christmas we recommit and reconnect ourselves to the Body of Christ, the Church, for, as Jesus reminds us, "wherever two or more are gathered in my name I am with them." The world which

Jesus entered a dark world and that dark world did not recognize Him. As people of faith, it is our role again this year to be willing to be Lights that shine in our world. Once the restrictions end, and worship and sacraments may return to some form of normalcy we shall find what we want to find every Christmas - the blessing of the Christ child and His invitation to be of service to all God's people.

Let me turn again to Pope Francis, who concluded his Wednesday audience with these comforting words: "May these difficulties help us purify Christmas, making it purer, more authentic, and true, with far less consumerism. As always, I turn finally to the elderly, the sick and the newlyweds. I wish that each one will receive the grace of these days: that it may become for you, the elderly, consolation, for you, young people, strength; for you, the sick, comfort; and for you newlyweds, trust in Divine Providence." This year, more than ever, we need to be as Jesus was in His time, lights of faith in a dark world. We know the Light at the end of the tunnel is more than just a vaccine, it is the promise of everlasting life which the birth of Jesus opened to all people.

May the peace and joy of Christmas and the promise it offers be the great gift of light and hope we share and proclaim to all. Christmas is not cancelled. If anything, this year we join the angels even louder in singing with joy, Hosanna in the Highest, and announce to all the world, Jesus Christ is here and on this very day in David's city our Saviour was born, the Light in the darkened world.

Fr. Ian Riswick

