

Christmas
December 25, 2018
“Deliverance and Salvation”

Is 9:1-6

Tit 2:11-14

Lk 2:1-14

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

We have all failed. We have all made serious mistakes. We have all done the wrong thing far too many times. This is because we are all sinful and have a hard time escaping our sinfulness.

Some of us even feel trapped in our sinfulness. We made a choice, from which there seems to be no escape – Or, we have basic wants and desires that we can't seem to live without!

As a consequence, many almost give up on God. They don't come to church – They are almost afraid to pray – They feel they are unworthy of God – And it takes more courage than they can muster to receive a blessing instead of the Eucharist at Communion time!

However, today is a day of hope for all of us. Today, the scriptures tell us that the darkness within ourselves can be destroyed by the light of God's revelation and love.

Isaiah wrote for a sinful Chosen People who had lived in the darkness of their own personal and national sinfulness. Most no longer really cared about God. But for the honest, and faithful, few, Isaiah promised hope in a future king who would bring deliverance and salvation. He would deliver them from the darkness of a chaotic world as well as from the darkness they could not escape within their own hearts and souls. Moreover, that kingdom was vast and peaceful, now and forever!

The shepherds were the first to experience that kingdom and the deliverance it brought. They, certainly, thought they were trapped. Dirty, unbathed, foul-smelling, even mangy – no one would have them. No one wanted them! They were not allowed in synagogue or Temple. How could they ever escape their plight or their own sinfulness?

But they must have prayed. They must have kept their faces turned toward God.

And God blessed them beyond belief!

God used angels to call them forth, and they became the first outsiders to discover the Light of the World and our salvation! It was in the infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying, homeless, in a feeding trough for animals.

Luke's Gospel selection goes on to proclaim that the peace of God will be granted to all those upon whom God's favor rests. And St. Paul's Letter to Titus teaches us the pathway to God's favor.

We can't go back to the inn of our daily lives or to the fields of our activities and forget what and whom we discovered in the manger. "We must reject godless ways and worldly desires, and live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age" – as we await the blessed hope of our ultimate salvation!

Brothers and Sisters, the brightness that breaks forth on this day is more than a momentary flash in our consciousness. For that brightness is the Light that Christ brings and is always there for us, if we keep the gift of himself before us every day of our lives.

What is important is that we don't give up. We can't quit trying to be better. This means an on-going struggle with all those things that have an unworthy hold on us!

Because, sooner or later, God will provide a grace – a real opportunity to break with the past – or not to go back to the past that has broken from us! What is critical is that we keep waiting for deliverance, with our face turned toward God and Jesus whom He sent. For they, alone, can deliver us from all the darkness that is within ourselves! They alone can give us that peace which surpasses all understanding!

And so, let us rejoice that we are here. Let us be grateful for the Gift that God has given us! And let us pray for that Grace that only God can give to each of us, when the time is right!

Amen.

December 25, 2018

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