

Christmas 2023

Dear friends,

Many of my favorite Christmas memories are associated with the worship and music of the holy season. One such memory comes from a special moment during Christmas Eve worship at the Church of the Advent in Ridgetown, Ontario around the year 1990. A congregational leader rose to sing “O Holy Night”, and I listened with bated breath, hoping that he would make it through. All of us who knew him were aware of the tragedy and sadness that had recently been a part of his family life, and we knew that those emotions were just beneath the surface. His voice was strong and clear, and as he finished there were tears rolling down the cheeks of many of those gathered.

From the first verse of that carol, the words “the weary world rejoices” have been with me these last days. Every year, it seems, our celebrations of Christmas take place amid some new horror or tragedy on the world’s stage. Every year, I am deeply conscious of those for whom the celebration of Christmas is layered with quiet suffering that might not be visible even to those closest to them. In this life there will always be more darkness than we can understand, more darkness than we can tolerate. Some of us, at least, will be weary every Christmas.

From the prologue to John’s gospel, we proclaim these words, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5, NRSV). For people of faith, this affirmation offers both hope and purpose. Hope, in our confidence that God’s love will never be overcome by any of the forces that oppose it. Purpose, in that we are called to be God’s light in the world, fighting back against those same forces.

As I reflected on the lyrics of “O Holy Night” I found myself drawn to the third verse, and these words, “Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother; And in His name all oppression shall cease.” Recognize that this carol was adapted from French and introduced to an American audience in 1855. Think of the boldness of these words in that context.

It will be my prayer that each of us might be filled with hope during this Christmas season, a hope that might fly in the face of the wisdom of the world, but which may be sustained in us by the light of God’s love for us. And it will be my prayer that each of us might shine with the light of God’s love for all in whose midst we live, that together we might push back the darkness a little further each day.

May this be a Christmas that fills your heart with memories that will last a lifetime!

Yours in Christ,

