

I was joking at the weekday Mass pointing out that Dec. 21<sup>st</sup> was the shortest day of the year. Well, back on June 20 – my dad would say – “Summer is winding down” – meaning the day light hours will be shorter. My mother, in particular did not like it, as summer is her favorite time of year.

What really bugged her is when we said, “NFL preseason is starting!” because that was a sign that fall was not far away. Now she says to us, “Playoffs will be soon starting – your season is coming to an end!”

Well, the good news is that the darkness will now give way to the light, as the days grow longer, just as Jesus’ birth dispelled the darkness for his light. It began in the darkness with the light of a star leading the world to this child of God.

The first light we followed will be the giver of eternal life. And after the end of life, we will see a beautiful light shining before us as our spirit will be lifted out of our body and all will be light for he is the Light.

Before the Word came as a human being, he was already in the world, sustaining all creation, for “All things came to be through him and without him nothing came to be.” (John 1:3)

But, now he comes as a human being, in a visible, touchable, lovable human nature. The Light that shines in the invisible heart of all reality is now shining on the face of the child in the crib.

He could have taken another approach if he had wanted to. Think of the tremendous energy he could have released. Think of the light he could have produced, a trillion times brighter than the brightest of the stars. Think of the heat he could have generated, a trillion times hotter than the center of the sun.

Let us not, therefore, mistake the simplicity of the babe for weakness. It is God who is laid in the manger. This prompted Saint Bernard to ask, "Lord, what made you so small?" And his ecstatic response was, "It was love!"

In becoming a member of the human family, Christ became every man and every woman. In joining the human family to himself, he has taken every member to himself.

On that night in Bethlehem, Mary wrapped the first Christmas present and the world has never been the same. The whole creation has become his body. The light of all the galaxies point to one thing– his love for you! All the beauty, goodness, and truth in the world are designed to win your heart to himself.

People are in church this evening for all kinds of reasons. Some come every week and embrace Christmas with special fervor. Some come occasionally, some infrequently. Some are here as a favor to family and friends. The good news of this night is, as the angel says, “for all the people.”

Whoever you are, for whatever reason you are here, every person in this church has a journey to make over the next year. For some it may be wonderful, but for some, it may be a journey with a difficult medical diagnosis.

For others, it may be a journey of financial problems in the coming year. Christmas is for you – for Christ is with you. For some there will be a loss or a personal crisis. For some a family may be under stress. Christmas is for you for “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5)

That first Christmas marked the beginning journey from this world to God’s world. The antidote to our fears is found in the coming of Christ into the world. The first words of Adam are "I was afraid." But the first words at the birth of Jesus are, "Do not be afraid." We are never alone in our journey.

Jesus says to us tonight, “You celebrate the anniversary of my birth over 2,000 years ago, but I’ve always been with you; I always will be. In the Eucharist In the Sacred Scriptures In the present moment In your loved ones I’m in each one of you.

I’m in the person in front of you and the person behind you. I’m in the person on your left and the person on your right. Okay, that might be a stretch! God continues to shine his light in the darkness of this world. The incarnation did not just happen on that first Christmas, but continues in all generations.

+Paco Amodar, a pastor in Little Village on Chicago's west side, lives in a neighborhood rife with gang violence. He tells the following story about being invited to lead a prayer vigil for a young man who had been gunned down by a rival gang.

When he arrived at the vigil, a large crowd of young people—including many known gang members were there. He prayed silently, "Jesus, what do you want me to do here?" As he looked out over the crowd, he realized most of these scary-looking gang members were just kids, mostly in their mid or late teens, with some in their twenties.

“What would Jesus say to these young people?” Then it came to him, "Since most of you are half my age, I am the age of your fathers.

Would you allow me to address you on behalf of your fathers? I know you have heard plenty of times how destructive gang behavior is. But today, on behalf of your dads, I want to say to you what should have been said a long time ago. My son, my daughter, would you forgive me for not being there for you when you were little?

Will you forgive me for not being there when you took your first steps? Will you forgive me for not being there to play catch with you when you were young? Will you forgive me for leaving you when you most needed me?"

As the words poured from his lips, he could not control himself. Tears ran freely down his cheeks and many of them started to weep with him. Something special happened in that moment...God incarnate.

“Following the gathering they started to trust me even though I had no credibility in their world. I hadn't shared their life, but I had shared their pain” – the Word made flesh.

Tonight, tomorrow, every day: Look for Christ. He is everywhere; with us tonight; in nursing homes, in shelters, in prisons, on the streets. Make room for Christ in your life. Be Christ to others.

This Christmas, let's not just give gifts – let us be a gift of light and love – the Word made flesh.