

"Dashing through the snow, in a one horse open sleigh...", "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas..." For weeks we have been bombarded by songs in the shops, on the TV and the radio, that present us with a sentimental Christmas, a world covered with a dusting of white snow where everyone has everything they want, and a jolly old time.

Our world isn't like that. Over the past few weeks I have met with people facing heart-breaking reality. A mother who has terminal cancer, a man whose life is ebbing. Then there is the burgeoning refugee crisis fuelled by the seeming unending war in the Middle East, the possible genocide in Myanmar. Terrorist attacks in throughout the world, devastation caused in schools and workplaces by random murderous rampages. We do truly live in the "land of deep darkness" described by the prophet Isaiah.

I'm sure you all know that there are two sets of Christmas stories in the gospels. One set of Christmas stories is from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and the other from the Gospel of John. The first set of Christmas stories are more familiar to us. We can see those stories, visualize those stories and imagine those stories such as Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the baby in the manger, the sheep and the shepherds, the angels and angel's choirs, the three wise men and their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But the second Christmas story comes from the Gospel of John and we cannot see or visualize or draw John's Christmas story. John's Christmas story is abstract and philosophical.

That is why I find myself inevitably drawn to the Prologue to John's gospel every Christmas. "The light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." The Christmas story isn't about angels, shepherds, donkeys, camels, wise men, stars or any of the rest. The Christmas story is summed up in those magnificent words from St John, "The light shines in darkness".

If you've ever been to the theatre, you'll grasp the image. Before the play starts, everything is dark, then on comes a spotlight, and a small pool of light bursts out across the stage. The darkness is still there, all around, but the light shines in the darkness, and piece by piece all is revealed, made clear.

Jesus is the spotlight shining in the darkness of our world, shedding light in the dark places of pain, of suffering, of hurt, of violence. Sometimes the light brings healing, sometimes comfort, sometimes revelation, sometimes challenge, but always peace. When the light of Jesus shines in our hearts, all fear is banished by the peace of the prince of peace.

When we look at the lands in deep darkness, often we can be prompted to ask two questions – does God not care? How do we see God revealed in this situation?

When we see God unveiled in Jesus we come to realise that of course God cares – that is why he came, to let the light shine in the darkness. He didn't come to take the darkness away – that won't happen till the day when he creates a new heaven and a new earth.

Jesus is the light shining into our darkness, and illuminating it with the light of hope, peace, love and joy.

In every dark, hurtful, difficult and painful day in my life, I have been conscious of being surrounded by so many Christians loving me, supporting me, caring for me, praying for me. Each plays their own part. Some pray, some offer practical support, some offer emotional support.

When Milli –Jean our grand-daughter was first diagnosed with Nephrotic Syndrome her family were completely overwhelmed by the offers to cook, to stay with her siblings: Ella and Beckford, to do anything practical, to talk, to listen, to be there, but above all, to pray.

They and we received messages from all over this country, and the UK; people telling us that they were praying for her in their homes, their churches, their bible studies. And to this day they still do.

There was the light shining in the darkness.

Jesus told us that we are the light of the world. The most powerful witness we can give to the reality of our faith in the Babe of Bethlehem is to let our light shine into all the dark places of the world, and to do it in his name.

Let your light shine.

A while ago there was a video posted on Youtube, and the image has been in the back of my mind ever since. It was called "Christmas Food Court Flash Mob, Hallelujah Chorus". In the middle of a shopping centre, as hundreds and thousands of people bustled about shopping, browsing, eating, a young woman with a mobile phone stood up from one of the tables in the food court and sang the opening bars of the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's Messiah. One by one, others stood up and joined her. After a while it became clear that this was a choir who had rehearsed and prepared, but they were dressed in their ordinary clothes, carrying shopping, and it just wasn't obvious who was in the choir, who was simply joining in, or who just wanted to show their respect for what was being expressed. The surprise and enjoyment on many faces was evident.

In the midst of the most secular expression of commercial Christmas were proclaimed the words "King of kings and Lord of lords... and he shall reign forever". It was amazing to watch those who weren't involved. At first they kept eating, and moving, but one by one they fell still and watched in awe and wonder, and at the end burst into a huge round of applause.

The light shines in the darkness.

I remember singing the song This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. In Sunday School. Jesus said that we (His disciples) are the light of the world. We must not hide that light under a bushel or in a church

building. We must let it shine. How will people see that light?

Through our good works.

Our responsibility as disciples and evangelists is to have lives so transformed by the Word and the inward presence of Christ that everyone can see His light reflected in our acts of kindness.