

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh



Christmas Eve, 2020

In Him was life, and that life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:4-5).

Dear Friends in Christ,

We all are approaching Christmas in the midst of great loss. I have just presided at the burial of Betsy's mother, a beloved matriarch known to our son and his cousins as Grandma Mary. I know I am not alone. Many of us have suffered losses this year. At this point in the pandemic, our hearts may be heavy, with seemingly no end in sight. And yet, Christmas is upon us. We cannot postpone it until a happier time. Whether we are ready for Him or not, Joy has come in the person of Jesus Christ, God-With-Us.

As I prayed at Mary's grave, I heard again the words of the Burial Office: *Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.* I looked down, and what I saw was not only the grave of a child of God, but the cradle of the newborn Christ, who is always being born into our death that He may lift us into His life.

He was always being born into a dark world. Whether you read Matthew, Luke, or John, you will find that the Christ Child tumbles into a season of dislocation, fear and grief. All the things we have suffered over the last several months were known to the world then — widespread disease, racial and ethnic hatreds, political upheaval, and more. The infancy of Jesus was full of the worst that can beset us. The hardship of His birth, the intrigue of Herod, the slaughter of the Innocents, the flight of His family — such things were common occurrences among human beings then, as they are now.

The gospel writers are saying that none of this was an accident; the Christ was born — *is* born — into the midst of the ordinary terrors that disrupt our lives. That has always been the point of His coming to us. Saint John puts it this way: *In Him was life, and that life was the light of humanity.* Then he concludes: *The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.*

So, the same is true now; the same darkness, and the same Light.

With news of the coming Covid vaccine, I have frequently heard that there is *light at the end of the tunnel.* But here is the true message of this season: The Light is not at the end of the tunnel. The Light is here, now, next to you, around you, in you, this Word-Made-Flesh, this God-With-Us.

And those of us who bear His name, also bear His power and His love. If you are afraid you may not make it, Christ will carry you. Your sisters and brothers will carry you — in our prayers, in our care, in our own hands, if need be. Only let your need be known to someone else, and Christ will meet you there. And, whenever you can, reach out your hands to another, extend your prayers, your love into the world, and again Christ will meet you.

And that, is the Joy, my friends. So, wherever you are, however you can, celebrate this Feast. Stay safe and well, and help others to do the same. For God has given us His Son, who is with us always, even to the end of the age.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dorsey", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh