

Keep It Simple!

There's an old adage about how things become clearer in the light of day. When we think about this in relation to our Advent theme of "simplicity," it makes sense; it works. Typically, darkness creates confusion, fear, uncertainty. Things aren't as simple to do in the dark as they are in the bright light of day.

However... I would say there is one big exception, though, when it comes to Christmas. ***In the candle-lit dimness of Christmas Eve, things are just easier; simpler.*** I imagine the shepherds coming that first night under the cover of darkness. They've just been told this amazing news, by a sky full of heavenly angels, no less, that God has taken on flesh and is now dwelling with His people. *"And this will be the sign/proof for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."* And so it's there in the middle of the night, in that dim candlelit stable, lay in a little feed trough that little baby they had been told about—God Himself in the flesh.

Now, can they see ***every last little detail*** in that dimly-lit room? No. It's not like in the paintings. Baby Jesus didn't have a bright, beaming halo of light around his head. Nor do they want to get too close either. After all, that is God! So it's through the long, dancing shadows cast by a couple of solitary candles that the shepherds are faithfully content in the simplicity of the angelic Word. There, in the dim light and dancing shadows, is the baby. There's Immanuel—God with us. Simple.

But then... daylight breaks, and I don't just mean the very next day. The shepherds were long gone by then. I mean all the days after that, including today. In the light of day, after all the romanticism of candlelit music and tradition has ceased, ***all our problems, worries, aches and pains are still there, aren't they?*** Singing "*Silent Night*" by candlelight was beautiful for the few minutes it lasted. So simple. So peaceful... ***but then it was over.*** The lights came back on. Back to the real world.

This is the challenge of the Christian faith ***"the day after Christmas Eve."*** This is why many a Christian prefers to "stay in the dark." I can't think of any other way to word it. They prefer to go through life with ***an immaturity of faith that prefers to see things dimly.*** Jesus is forever the little baby in the manger. Life is just simpler that way. ***God is a cute, innocent, harmless little baby.*** There's no danger in this kind of God. There are no consequences for sinful behavior. Besides, who doesn't love a little baby? ***What's a cute and cuddly baby gonna do?*** You're telling me that this cute and cuddly little baby would be angry or upset with my sin? That guy on the cross? Sin? Suffering? Death? It's almost as if He's an entirely different character in the little fairytale they've created.

So, yeah... it's here, in the glaring light of day that faith struggles. ***And the irony isn't lost on me here.*** As we make our way through this dark and shadowy valley of sin and death, the glaring light of sinful reality bears down upon us. ***We see more clearly the suffering, the pain, the sorrow, the hurt.*** It's not hidden in shadows or softened by the peace that a single candle can bring to a dark room. No... it's all out in the open, plain to see. It's often when all our troubles are laid bare, and it feels like we're at our lowest, like we're in the Death Valley part of life, being scorched in the glaring light of a day in this fallen and sinful world; it's here in this bright and glaring light that we find ourselves, ***ironically, in the darkest parts of our life.*** We feel alone, confused, afraid, uncertain.

Now, it would, at this point, be very easy to do just as so many prefer to do; that is, lead you back into the seemingly more simple existence in dimness and darkness. ***"If I don't see it, then it's not a problem."*** I understand why many a "good Christian" prefers staying in the shadows, as it were. I don't condone it, but I understand it. But for me to do this would not be faithful. It wouldn't be right. ***Rather than lead you into ignorance, immaturity of faith, and shadows and darkness, I point you, instead, to the Light of world.*** His Light shines brighter than any/all other lights combined. His Light is the light that lights all of heaven, where there is no sun or moon or stars. There is only the Light of Christ. He is the Light—the marvelous Light—no darkness has/can overcome.

And that's just it: When life is lived in the marvelous Light of Christ, things really are just easier/simpler. That's not to say that life in this fallen and sinful world will magically become easy/simple. Not at all. The faith that walks in the Light of Christ is going to be ***hunted and pursued*** by the adversaries. In fact, it should come as no surprise that the devil does some of his ***best*** work in these dark moments, ***coming, not in wrath and fury, but as a beautiful angel of light, promising a "better way, an easier way."*** What does St. Paul say about all this? ***"If even a beautiful angel of light should come to you with a 'gospel' that is different than the Gospel you've been taught by us, let him be accursed!"*** Do not be deceived! Life will be tough, and there will be plenty of times that things seem dark. But the Light of Christ shines brightest in the darkest of darkness! Again, He is the Light that no amount of darkness has ever or will ever overcome.

I could go on, but I won't. Keep it simple, right? That's why this Christmas Day worship is so important. It's so important to the faith because it reminds us, in the midst of all the darkness that is life in this fallen and sinful world, ***that the Light of Christ still shines forth.*** Don't make it more dark and difficult than what it is. Look no further than right here in your midst, right where He tells us to seek Him; right where He leads us, by faith, to be. I realize what you see here in the glaring light of day isn't all that impressive. A few words in a book. A little water in a fancy little font. A little bread wafer and a little swig of wine. I know I'm not

all that impressive. It's so easy to shrug the shoulders and say "meh." It's so easy, especially when things seem dark and distressing, to look past these things of God and cry out, "*Give me a sign! Give me something!*" Things get dark and trying, and we want the lightning bolts... but God doesn't give us lightning bolts. He gives us the Light of the world... and here He is... for you, for you now, and for you always. It's that simple, and praise God it is. Merry Christmas. **AMEN.**