



A Message for the Sundays Following Christmas

Bishop Craig Loya, X Bishop of Minnesota

2021

The story of Christmas is the story of how the fullness of God's power is revealed in the small places, the forgotten corners, and the faces of those who have been pushed aside by the empires of the world. God wields all the power in the universe by showing up vulnerable, cold, homeless, and on the run. That's how light shows up in the world, that's where light starts to pierce the darkness.

During these twelve days of Christmas, the church is invited to contemplate what happens when perfect light and love show up in the forgotten people and places of the world. The short version is that the darkness doubles down on its attempt to extinguish it. On December 27, 28, and 29, we celebrate three consecutive feasts that bear that out. St. Stephen, among the first deacons, is stoned to death by religious leaders, St. John the Evangelist is exiled to the island of Patmos by the empire who would not tolerate his witness to the light, and the Holy Innocents are the newborn children slaughtered by a ruler mad to hold on tightly to his power.

The earliest Christians were regularly and painfully reminded that darkness very much remained after Christmas, and, at every turn, they bore heroic witness to the light the darkness cannot overcome, and does not comprehend.

In our own day, we too are reminded on all sides of the lingering dark forces of death, sickness, injustice, oppression. But no matter how weary we are from two years of pandemic, no matter how angry we are at the injustices that persist in our nation, no matter how crushing the grief we might have been handed in each of our hearts, we know, we know, that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

We know because just a few days ago we saw the angels light up the night sky over a forgotten desert landscape to make the poor, disreputable shepherds in the middle of nowhere the first to hear how the God of all things shows up. We know because we went with them—virtually, or in person, or through some hybrid thing we patched together, with all the uncertainty about whether to sing or gather or whatever—however we did it, we went with them to the manger and saw the God of all things lying there helpless, sanctifying forever all those who hide in fear with no power, announcing unmistakably that God is on their side. We know because over and over throughout human history, in the darkest days our world has known, in the face of the brutality



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and meanness we inflict on each other, followers of Jesus have continued to shine God's light into the deepest darkness. From St. Stephen and St. John, through the mountains of all the other martyrs who have witnessed to love in the face of bloodthirsty and power starved empires down the ages, through people like Julian of Norwich, and St. Francis of Assisi, Oscar Romero, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day., Hiram Hisanori Kano, and all the other ordinary people who have borne witness in small and large ways to the light the darkness did not overcome.

All those saints knew what we know all too well: the darkness won't ever fully disappear this side of the kingdom, but we can be sure that despite all the evidence to the contrary, the darkness does not have the last word. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

And the great good news is that it is not up to us to be the light. It is not up to us to wrestle the darkness to the ground and keep it at bay by our own efforts, or our own goodness, or our own cleverness or whatever. We are not the light, but like John the Baptist, we simply testify to the light. Even when the darkness seems to be winning—when black, brown, and indigenous bodies are routinely murdered, when children simply accept the possibility of being gunned down in school, when our loved ones are taken from us with a terrifying randomness—even when the darkness seems to be winning, it matters that we stand in the midst of it, in the very depths of it, pointing to the light of God's love, longing for it to come in fullness.

If you are weary, if you are despairing, if you are uncertain about what to do next, the twelve days of Christmas are an invitation to let go, remember that it turns out you are not God, and the darkness is not yours alone to fix. What is ours to do is to keep standing in the light, to keep standing up for the light, to keep holding fast to the promise: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

We have seen the light, dear ones, and we can see it in every moment, every encounter, every breath. May we be so fully soaked in the light, that everything we do draws the whole dark and cold world into the perfect embrace of God's love. Amen.