

December 24, 2011
10 pm
[Readings for Nativity of Our Lord (II), Christmas Day]

Isaiah 62:6–12
Psalm 97
Titus 3:4–7
Luke 2:[1–7] 8–20

I.N.I.

We have waited for Christmas to come, and those days of waiting we have called Advent.

The dark of winter doesn't get any darker than these waning days of December, and for centuries people have told stories, sung songs, prayed prayers, lit fires, and broke open the larder to feast.

This is a protestation against the chill of winter.

This is a declaration against the terror that stalks in the night.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, survivor of apartheid, activist, a diminutive South African whose speechifying and death defying attitude and action earned him a Nobel Peace Prize wrote these words that have been made into a ditty that works for me on Christmas, on Easter, and on any dark and dreary day:

*Goodness is stronger than evil,
Love is stronger than hate,
Light is stronger than darkness,
Life is stronger than death,
Victory is ours, victory is ours through God who loves us.*

Bishop Tutu is the sentinel like the prophet of light called Isaiah recruits to remind God to restore the world from ruin.

Bishop Tutu has declared the ways of God in the midst of apartheid, in the reparations South Africa made through its Peace and Reconciliation Committee, to any and all he encounters, that we are in this world together. He and others use the Zulu word **ubuntu**, which he describes as *the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.*

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_%28philosophy%29

In the waiting days of Advent, we have prayed that Christ will come.

In these feasting days of Christmas, we announce that Christ has come.

This is the story, that God fulfills the prophetic declaration that

²*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness —
on them light has shined.*

God has bared a holy arm. God, Immanuel, God with us, is made known in Jesus, the child born in a manger in a world that sags under the weight of oppression and poverty, and the imbalance between wealthy and destitute.

- The ruling Caesar decides to tax and comes up with a program to count everyone.
- The holy family has no place to bed for the night, nor have adequate accommodations for the birth of their firstborn.
- Mary surely was scared about the pain of contractions, and spilled blood along with the baby coming from her womb.
- Shepherds, not known for their sophistication, were the ones who scrambled to the manger and told about their visit in the night of angelic hosts.
- A gang of angels blazed the brightness of God's glory, and had to say don't be afraid right after scaring the pants off the unsuspecting shepherds.

And what was the declaration: **Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace** where? On earth. On the ground. Around the globe.

Wherever it is dark, there God's light goes.

While as brutal powers and intractable politicians continue to grind away, tonight we process with Mary and Joseph, shepherds, and angels, and a child who leads them.

We remember the prophecy that says the lion will lay down with the lamb, and we say no to violence.

We see the wood of the manger and remember the wood of the cross, and in both places see God with us, in birth and in death.

On this dark night we light candles to hold sway against all that threatens, and welcome Christ in.

This Christ is here to save sinners.

This Christ is here to reconcile divided families.

This Christ is here to raise up those who have died, those who have given up, those who have long ago or just today decided there is no hope.

At the birth of Christ we say that God has made a home with us.

God gets as close to us as a child who needs love.

God gets as close to us as a brother who shares a holiday meal with us.

God gets close as a friend who shares our grief.

God gets as close as the mother, the husband, the lover, the one who shares a seat with you tonight, and announces that the days of exile are over, the time of longing is fulfilled, time itself is redeemed so that we are made to be a new creation, a new community, a new family that sings with angels and shepherd, peacemakers and warmongers, with Mary and Joseph and others that join our procession of light, singing something like

*Goodness is stronger than evil,
Love is stronger than hate,
Light is stronger than darkness,
Life is stronger than death,
Victory is ours, victory is ours through God who loves us.*

Ubuntu.
Merry Christmas.
Glory to God.
Peace on Earth.

I.N.I.