

Year B Christmas 1, December 27, 2020

✚ We finally made it! We have got to the end of the tunnel. We're out – and it is very bright out here. I was once down a mine shaft, which is a kind of tunnel. When they turned off the lights, it was completely black. I couldn't see anything – not even my hand if I put it right in front of my eyes. They put the lights back on, but even then it was pretty dim. It is a very gloomy place down a mine shaft, and it is damp and dirty.

✚ Can you imagine living your whole life like that, in a dark tunnel? Life is just dark and damp and uncomfortable. You don't ever go very far, because it is scary in the dark. You might get lost, or something really frightening could be around the corner. Imagine that this is

your life. Then one day, something happens, something strange appears down a tunnel you haven't visited before. What could it be? You're not sure. Something draws you to it – it feels good. Could this be light? People have told you about light with such wonder and excitement, but could it be real? Is that what this is? Is it safe?

✚ Well, that light is really intriguing, and something about it feels “warm”, not the usual damp and chilliness of the mine. So, over the years, you get brave and from time to time, you venture down this strange tunnel. At first, you would just go maybe 50 metres and it still felt good – nothing bad would happen. So, you

began going further: 100 metres, 200 hundred metres, 300 metres ... One day you walked a whole kilometre down the tunnel. You walked so far that the air around you began to get a bit light. You could make out your hand in front of your face. Wow, that's what I look like! And the air felt a little less chilly and damp – maybe even a touch of warmth! It felt good to be here.

✚ You would come back to this spot many times and begin to notice how that little bit of warmth felt good in your bones after a while, and as your eyes got used to this light, more details of your hands became clearer. You even brought a special friend or two to this spot sometimes, and some of them now came by themselves.

✚ Then you began to go even further towards this light. Once you got so far, you began to see what you'd learn later were colours. Your hands were kind of pale, and when you rubbed the black and brown dirt off them, you could see pink tones on your palms. This was amazing. Would any of your friends believe you if you told them about “colour”? How could you even describe it?

✚ And the warmth in the air here felt so good on your skin. In the distance, you could make out a big round (white) thing – just on the wall. What could it be? Could that be the source of all of this? You wanted to go and find out, but what if it swallowed you up or was so warm that it burned you up? It was kind of scary and exciting at the same time.

✚ So, unsure, you turned around and went back into the tunnel. You kept coming back to this spot, though. It felt safe and warm and bright, but every time, you would look at that light and feel drawn to it. It almost felt like it spoke to you. “This is where you belong?” “This is what you were made for.” “Come and see”.

✚ Over the years, you would tiptoe a little further ... and further, getting closer and closer, and the light felt warmer and warmer and the brightness showed not only more colour in your skin and on the walls around you, but it also revealed the dirt you were covered in. It made you feel unclean and a bit embarrassed, even shy ... certainly not sure if you could go much further and be even better seen by whatever or whoever might be there ... and this light felt

like a someone. It seemed to call to you more and more earnestly.

✚ Then one day, you did it! You felt a deep trust and comfort with this light. It was still a bit scary. You weren't sure what you'd find, but you just charged down the tunnel and into that light. You burst out of what turned out to be a kind of hole in the ground of a place you could barely take in it was so big. At first, the light was so intense that you had to close your eyes, but even with your eyes closed, you could see that your eyelids were a kind of dark pink or red; and the warmth was amazing. You just basked in it as you sat there with your eyes closed.

✚ After a while, when your eyes had adjusted a bit, you opened them up and discovered that the world was so much bigger than you could possibly have imagined. Soon, you would come to know the names of these things: trees, birds, rivers, mountains, animals and other people – all clean, and with wonderful shades of skin colour from pink to a very dark brown, not like your pale white skin. You just sat there in awe and heard the air itself, which seemed to say “welcome”. You were finally home.

✚ I have had you walking down that tunnel toward the light all of Advent. We have heard great things in the dark: great promises of what this light will bring. Primarily, salvation, which is the ability to truly see the love in which we dwell, to have hearts so open to this love – so

attuned to it – that it feels like home. It is the ability to breathe deeply of the rich air which gives us life, and it is fullness of health, allowing us to live fully.

✚ The tunnel has been very dark recently. If truth is light, then lies are dark. Truth reveals, darkness hides. In the dark, we have heard rumours of the end of life: COVID, environmental disaster, nuclear war, people who don't look like me that I must fear, people who aren't worth as much as me and who are in some way not as important. These people want what I have and will kill me for it. There are all kinds of lies in the dark – and this past year it has been very dark, and the lies have been very big. The biggest lie is that the future is bleak and desolate and hard and bitter.

✚ But, we have seen a great light down the tunnel and we have been making our way to it with great purpose, because even in the darkness, the light isn't dimmed. In fact, it reveals the false truths of the darkness and promises that life is so much bigger, and is ultimately about love, not hate, about life, not death. This light has spoken to us through the prophets like Isaiah, and through the gospel writers. We have heard that we must prepare ourselves, because we are about to be dazzled – we are about to see life in a completely new way, through the eyes of this light, which have been made human eyes in the birth of Jesus.

✚ This is big news! As John puts it, in the incarnation – the birth of Jesus – God has come

into the world to be in and among us: to be the eyes of God through which we can see; to be the ears of the divine and to understand the mystery of parables and paradoxes as we hear Jesus speak them; to be the hands of Jesus as he dwells in us, in order to touch the world, hold the world, feed the world, heal the world.

✚ Today, in this Christmas season, we enter the light that has been ahead of us in the tunnel. At the end of the tunnel, we kneel with shepherds and angels and wise men as the halo above this little baby shines brightly and as the huge star above this little stable fills the air with its light. This is how the gospel writers describe this moment, this epiphany.

✚ After almost a year of pandemic life, a year of economic, environmental, political, and social disruption; a year of illness and death for many; of grief and weariness and flat-out exhaustion for others; a year of tedious regulations and restrictions; here we are – kneeling before this manger, looking at this baby. What does this light look like? What does it feel like? What does it promise us? What is the truth it reveals? What are the lies it reveals?

✚ In the gospel reading this morning, Simeon is beside himself with joy, Mary and Joseph are amazed, Anna like Simeon just bursts into praise of God. In Jesus, they see the fulfillment of God's promise: "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for Israel.*"

✚ In the eye of my heart I see the salvation of the world. In the birth of Jesus – of God with us – I see not a bleak, barren future for humankind, for our brother and sister species and for this planet. How could I? God is in the world. God has integrated the very divine being of love and life into this timebound reality. There can be no more death or weeping and gnashing of teeth: at least, that isn't the end.

✚ I have great hope for my children, grandchildren and even great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great-grandchildren. Not because God is going to come and smite the bad guys and with a swoop of her mighty arms restore this planet to its pristine beauty. No! The point is that if God is with us, then we are with God and we share in the divine, life-giving

creativity. The Church is one of God's great projects to lead us from darkness to light. There are other projects out there as well. God works in all kinds of mysterious ways, but for me, I know that when I enter the story I am already a part of and see the baby lying in a manger, I know that the salvation of the world is at hand. Death does not have the final word.

✚ We, God's chosen servants are called to be a huge part of this particular project of building creation. It isn't finished, and as people who follow and offer our obedience to Jesus, God with us, we are a huge part of the solution. God is working the miracle of salvation in and through us. It is mind-blowingly amazing when you think about it: the birth of God into the world – the incarnation – comes to mean that

you and I have a share in God's power to bring life and not death; to bring love and not hate; to bring peace and not war; to bring wholeness and not disease and planetary despoilment. Because of the birth of Jesus, we have that power. Now let's go out and do something amazingly, mind-blowingly incredible with it! Let's make this a better world for our great-great- great- great- great- great-grandchildren and for every species we share this planet with. And – by the way, Merry Christmas!