

## **The Light Which Overcomes All Darkness**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In a little over three weeks the world will be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man some 2000 years ago. Even though the focus of this celebration is sometimes vastly different from one person to the next depending upon one's religious belief, background, and piety, there are some things which everyone living in the Judeo-Christian world recognizes.

First, the birth of Jesus Christ is at the center of world history in that it divides history itself into two halves – BC (before Christ) and AD (in the year of our Lord). Because of this all other events, whether they be the building of the pyramids in Egypt some two thousand years before Christ or the signing of the Declaration of Independence in the year 1776 AD – they are all marked in relation to the birth of the Lord.

And second, the birth of Jesus Christ stands at the crossroads of salvation history, serving as the divide between the Old and New Testaments. It was the coming of the Messiah which completed the Old Covenant and inaugurated the New. In fact the very last chapter in the whole of the Old Testament, Chapter 4 of the Prophet Malachi, speaks of the coming day of the Lord, when the Sun of Righteousness will appear, and the Messiah will shine forth. And likewise, the very first chapter of the New Testament, Chapter 1 of St. Matthew's Gospel, speaks of this day and the appearance of this Sun telling of the birth of "Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."

And so, at the very center of world history and the very center of salvation history we find Jesus Christ, the Lord God in the flesh.

Now if we extend things out from the center a little more, beyond the realm of time and space, before the creation of the world and after it's end, we'll also see that there too do we find God Himself. In the beginning the Lord created the world calling it from non-existence into being, and in the end it will be the Lord who will also bring a close to this age with His Glorious Second Coming. This is why the Lord is called as the Scriptures say the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the ending.

And so we find the Lord at the middle of human history, at it's beginning, and at it's end. At these times – the beginning, the middle, and the end– when the Lord is visibly present with His creation, the world is a very different place, it is transfigured by God's glory and His light. And likewise, the Lord's people are also different. Remember the state of Adam and Eve before the Fall – their purity and innocence, remember how wonderful it was for the Apostles to walk the earth with God Himself as He healed the sick, raised the dead, and preached the Kingdom. And how glorious will be the state of man when he is recreated by God in the age to come.

Yet, during those times in between, during the period from the creation of the world to the Incarnation of Christ, and from the Incarnation of Christ to the Second Coming, we see that state of mankind fluctuating between light and darkness.

We all know what this is like from our own spiritual lives, how easily we can fluctuate between sin and holiness, between following the Lord and turning from His ways. Sometimes, we feel ourselves overflowing with love for God that we would even die for Him, while at other times, we are tempted like the Apostle Peter to deny the Lord and His teaching.

This is what we see throughout the whole of the Old Testament. Sometimes the people would follow the Lord and His Prophets and other times they would not. Sometimes they would live in the light of God's ways and other times they would abide in darkness. It was like night and day changing back and forth.

This is just one example of how when the Lord is not visibly present with us, His people, when He is not walking with us in the Garden or on the dirt roads of Palestine, we find ourselves spiritually wavering between light and darkness. This is because during the time when the Lord's presence is not felt so acutely, the spiritual life becomes much more difficult. The struggle is greater, the battle more fierce.

St. Paul talked about this battle in today's Epistle when he said that we wage war not against flesh and blood but against the spirits of evil, "against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers, of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places." And because of this he tells us to put on spiritual armor, the armor of God, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the belt of truth, having our feet shod with the Gospel of peace, and in our hands carrying the shield of the faith and the sword of the Spirit. In this way, the Christian is ready for battle, ready to fight to the death in the army of Christ.

This imagery of life being a spiritual battle is apparent throughout our services but perhaps is nowhere so noticeably as in the baptismal service where the newly baptized is referred to as a newly enlisted warrior in the army of Jesus Christ. The army of course is the Church, the chief general is Jesus Christ, the lesser officers are the clergy, and the laity are those who fight on the front lines engaging in the struggle for godliness in a spiritually hostile world.

In this war, as in any war, some battles are won, others are lost, and sometimes the battle finds us and sometimes we go out to initiate the attack – sometimes the Church goes on the offensive.

Consider the example of St. Paul himself. He underwent many temptations and trials in his life, he accepted many wounds and carried many scars. And he recounts some of this for us in his second Epistle to the Corinthians when he says that "five times from the Jews he received forty stripes minus one. Three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, three times he was shipwrecked. And he spent a night and a day in the deep... often in dangers from his race; in dangers from the heathen; in dangers in the

city; in dangers in the wilderness; in dangers on the sea; in dangers among false brothers.”

Yet even while undergoing such struggles, St. Paul still set his mind to take the battle directly to the enemy, to go on the offensive. Even while constantly trying to ward off the enemies attacks, St. Paul still had the burning desire to bring the Light of Jesus Christ to the city of Rome – to the city so immersed in the darkness of paganism, immorality, and worldly deceit that the city was believed even by some of the Faith to be unconquerable.

Yet, of course St. Paul took the Gospel to Rome anyway. He took the light of Christ into the darkness of that city and what happened? Exactly what St. John the Theologian wrote in His Gospel, “The light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it.” This city which had once been a den of iniquity, this city which had once abided in moral and spiritual darkness had been won over and conquered for Christ. And it happened because St. Paul was willing to take the battle to the enemy, to bring the Light of Christ exactly where it needed to go, into the world’s darkest places.

And St. Paul was brave enough to do this because he knew that just as in the physical world, when light shines in a dark place, the darkness always dissipates, so too in the spiritual world, when God shines His divine light where there is the darkness of immorality or unrighteousness, the darkness always flees.

Brothers and sisters, St. Paul is an example for us. Let us not be afraid to take the offensive in our spiritual battles. We fight in the army of Jesus Christ, we are His soldiers and He is our general, and with the Lord at our side we have nothing to fear.

And even if we lose some battles, even if we are spiritual wounded – and this is to be expected – we know that in the end victory is still assured for the Lord will come again just as He had come some 2000 years ago. He will come again as light which flashes from one side of the earth to the other, dispelling darkness no matter where it be.

And with the Lord’s Second Coming this light of Christ, which we experience in part even now, will shine more brightly and more powerfully and for all of eternity in that never ending day of His Kingdom. This is that Kingdom which existed even before the world came into being, that Kingdom which the Lord revealed through His Incarnation, and that Kingdom to which we all have been called in the Age to come. For the Lord is our alpha and omega, He is our beginning, our middle, and our end. To Him be the glory: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!