Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm 98

Hebrews 1:1-12

John 1:1-14

The opening verses of John’s Gospel this morning, present the eternal background of what happened in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Jesus’ whole ministry is revealed to us as the Word-made-flesh, the light that darkness could not overcome, the fullness of God’s love for us. This revelation did not begin with the Christmas event; it began at creation:1 “In the beginning...” These words are found at the start of the Book of Genesis and at the start of John’s Gospel. This is by design. John wants to grab our attention and force us to consider who Jesus really is. These first verses of the Good News according to John are in many ways a hymn to Jesus, the Word; the Word that created in the beginning, the Word that created again at Jesus’ birth, the Word that still creates whenever anyone receives Jesus in faith.2

For the past four weeks of Advent, we have been preparing ourselves for this day of wonder and joy. We remember that on that silent and holy night, God became flesh, the creator became the created, love itself came down from heaven. No one can deny the centrality of the Christmas celebration to our faith. But without Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension and coming again, Christmas makes little sense in and of itself. Therefore, our Advent celebrations pointed us beyond the baby in the manger, beyond the shepherds on the hillside, beyond the angel choirs singing “Glory to God in the highest.”

Today, with the shepherds, we sing the glad tidings of Jesus’ birth. But we know that this baby lying in a manger would later be brutally tortured and hung to die on a cross. We believe that this same baby wrapped in swaddling clothes rose from the dead, ascended to his Father and sent us the Holy Spirit, his own first gift to those who believe. So we do not lose hope. We look at that great arc of salvation history and tread along the pilgrim journey year after year...from Advent to Christmas...from Ash Wednesday to Easter...from Easter to Pentecost…and beyond. As we celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus, we do so with an eye to the future, for Jesus will return in power and great triumph.

Since the beginning of time, the world has been groaning in birth pangs, laboring to complete God’s great mission, pushing hard to bring about heaven on earth. Every day we come nearer to the fullness of creation, being brought out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life. Every day we can hear the excited voices of those who encounter the poor, the alien, the less-than-perfect and find God in their midst. Every day we are invited to join the triumph of the skies and witness to the fact that this tiny baby brought peace to earth and mercy mild. This infant showed us that God and sinners can be reconciled. And we also proclaim Jesus to be the light of God’s countenance. For Jesus is that dawn from on high that breaks upon us. Jesus is that radiance shining on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Jesus is that beauteous heavenly light that guides our feet into the way of peace.

Regardless of the horrors of terrorism, or the fear that grips us in the midst of a natural disaster, or the shock at continued gun violence across our nation, Jesus is that light that shines in the darkness, that light that no darkness can overcome, that light that gives us hope. And so we wait in joyful confidence for the second coming of our God. Ours is not to know when this will happen. It might be today, or tomorrow or so far in the future that our great-great-great grandchildren will wonder if this is all just a story. So, until Jesus reappears, we are called to carry on with God’s mission....straightening the way, leveling the barriers, smoothing out the conflicts.

We do stumble and fall at times, but we are granted grace to repair the damage created by our self-centeredness. We are provided assistance to fill in the pot holes that are the result of our greed. We are blessed with opportunities to remove those boulders that block us from loving one another as much as God loves each of us. God knows our every need, both as individuals and as a world. God knows that we needed a Savior, and so God sent us his only begotten Son, that we might have life, and have it to the full. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” “O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”

1. http://liturgy.slu.edu/ChristmasC12/theword\_indepth.html

2. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\_date=12/25/2010