



KEEPING WATCH WITH THE SHEPHERDS IN BETHLEHEM

Instead, it describes the coming of Jesus at Christmas in an image, a light shone in the darkness. Notice that John doesn't say that a light shone *into* the darkness, but that it shone *in* the darkness. That's an important distinction.

Christmas, Christ being born in our world, is very much about finding God inside of what's commonplace and inside even the darkness of sin, violence, war, greed, and the indifference that sometimes seem everywhere.

Christmas is about light being seen inside of darkness. One of the things that Christmas asks us to do is to imitate the shepherds in the Christmas story and keep watch, hoping to see "light inside of darkness". How do we do that?

Our Christian tradition has different ways of expressing it, but it's what Jesus meant when he told us to "read the signs of the times" and what John of the Cross meant when he said that "the language of God is the experience that God writes into our lives." God is inside ordinary life, and our job is to see God there.

We live in a world where what we see is often simply bitterness, wound, non-forgiveness, anger, greed, false pride, lust, injustice, and sin. Where do we see light inside of that? Do you see light in the 6:00 news each night?

Our attitudes, our thoughts, our feelings, our wounds, and our virtues form the prism through which we see. Therefore, the task is to link our eyesight to the virtues of Christmas. What are these?

Christmas speaks of childlikeness, wonder, innocence, joy, love, forgiveness, family, community, and giving. When we are in touch with these, we more easily see what's special inside of ordinary life. These make light shine in the darkness.

Like the shepherds we're asked to watch in the night and we're watching when, in our hearts, there is more wonder than familiarity, more childlike trust than cynicism, more love than indifference, more forgiveness than bitterness, more joy in our innocence than in our sophistication, and more focus on others than on ourselves.

Christmas is meant to soften the heart and it's that which sharpens the eyesight. Rolheiser, OMI