

St Marc, Grenoble
Christmas Eve Midnight Service
Friday 24th December 2021
Isaiah 52: 7 - 10
John 1: 1 - 14
'The Word'

Good Evening, thank you for coming to join us this evening

It is good to welcome you to what is, probably, the most special service of the Christian year for me. Even more so, when I think that in 2 days' time we will have been here in Grenoble for a whole year. Quite remarkable!

But the passage from Isaiah, which we heard a few minutes ago, probably written sometime around 750+ years before Jesus was born on earth, is so appropriate for us here in Grenoble:

'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who proclaim salvation.'

The prophet announces the Good News of the Salvation of our God for the people of Zion - and describes sentinels, watchmen, singing for joy as they witness the return of the Lord to comfort and redeem His people.

We are, in effect, descended from those sentinels, the family of God's people - gathered here, tonight, singing for joy to welcome the salvation of our God! Nearly 3,000 years after that original prophecy.

This 'Good News' of peace and salvation, which our redeemer brings, is desperately needed in a world, which currently seems to be full of strife, disagreement, greed, jealousy, rampant sickness and uncertainty.

But, the Gospel passage I just read takes us back much further. It is the quintessential Christmas passage; probably one of the most well known, and possibly one of the most misunderstood passages in the whole Bible.

But, I hope that reading it in a modern translation may have refreshed your view of it. I'd say it's one of the foundational passages of our Christian faith – so much easier to understand when we realise 'The Word' the Gospel writer is referring to is Jesus himself.

It helps us to understand that Jesus' relationship with God the Father predates creation; Jesus has been around since before the world began.

Jesus always has been part of the very existence of God. This reading affirms Jesus was involved in creation, and bringing life to the human race.

Then, in verse 6, there's an aside, as the Gospel writer tells us about John the Baptist's important role in preparing the way for Jesus' ministry here on earth. 'The Messenger' alerting people to the Son of God's presence, and to the remarkable redemption Jesus was bringing with him - for all people.

And that's one of the most remarkable things about Jesus, one of the things that was constantly apparent during His ministry here on earth. It was also one of the things the Jewish people found most difficult to accept about Him, and one of the things that has shaped the nature of the church in the last two thousand years; it is that He came to bring light and life to *anyone who will accept Him*; not just to a select, exclusive or specially chosen group.

In fact, we know that the first announcement of His birth was to poor, ordinary shepherds – who were the social outcasts of the day, on the margins of their society – people who were considered unfit to testify in a court of law and ceremonially unclean so they weren't allowed to worship in the temple. (Yet, ironically, they were needed to provide lambs for the sacrifices in the temple)

We also know that Jesus' resurrection was revealed first to women, who in the Jewish culture of His day were considered second class citizens, especially where matters of religion were concerned.

The lovely reading we've just heard, describes Jesus as **the** true light that gives light to every human being.

And the most remarkable thing of all, is that Jesus offers His redeeming love to everyone. To you and to me, no matter who we are, what we've done, or haven't done, or where we live.

Jesus loves every one of us and offers to deal with our sin, once and for all, so that our link with God – the Fullness, can be reconciled, re-established. He offers that to you, and you, and you and me, so that we can enjoy the true fullness of God in every part of our lives.

And, whether He does that depends, quite simply, on one thing only, our response. All we need to do is to be willing to accept His redemption, His love, His Peace and His Joy and welcome Him into our lives, so that He can redeem us and repair our link with our Heavenly Father.

So, as I close, let's spend a moment reflecting on the wonderful love and reconciliation with God's amazing fullness, which Jesus offers each one of us – not just this Christmas time, but always.

Remember, if you want him to come and transform your life, with His redeeming love, all you have to do is to accept His offer, invite Him in – and He'll do the rest. **Let's pray ...**