

## Christmas 08

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. “

“For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for flames.” For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.”

These sentences from our first reading for this Christmas Mass of Midnight come from verses 1 to 6 of the ninth chapter of the Book of Isaiah which some scripture scholars believe to be “a liturgical piece excerpted from the ceremony of a royal ascension.” Or more simply said, scholars believe that these verses were used in a religious service which took place whenever a new king of Israel was crowned. You remember that Israel first had judges as its rulers, but the people wanted to have a king just as the neighboring nations had kings, and God gave way to their wishes. The first king was Saul. The second was David who lived around 1000 B.C. There were many kings after David, but none of them ever came close to him in the minds of the Jews. David became the ideal for every succeeding king, and the future ideal king which Israel awaited, the one referred to as the Messiah, was portrayed as

David redivivus, David returned. Like David, this final king would become God's adopted son on the day of his coronation.

The writers of the Gospels saw this Davidic hope fulfilled in Jesus. Both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels trace Jesus' genealogy back to David so that we the readers can know that Jesus is of David's family.

And so tonight the church applies Isaiah's text about the ideal king to Jesus. He is the child born to us, the son given to us. It is on his shoulder that dominion rests. He is the Wonder-Counselor, the God-Hero, the Father-Forever, the Prince of Peace. He is the one who confirms and sustains David's throne, by judgment and justice, both now and forever. Amen.

The opening sentence of this text from Isaiah began with the inspiring sentence: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." We believe that Jesus is that light and that we can walk with him. What should our lives look like if we really walk in the light of Jesus? Our second reading tonight from the Letter of Titus tells us that walking with the Lord will train us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly and devoutly. The words sound very formal. They don't get down

to particulars. Nevertheless I believe that we all have a sense of what they are saying. A devout, just and temperate life. Yes, we know people who live this way. But what about ourselves? Are we enamored of wealth and power and fame? If so, we have to learn to fight against this leaning. That is why it is so good and necessary to recall this evening's Gospel and a line from it which almost appears to be a throw-away line but is in fact central to the whole story: "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

No room for them in the inn. Couldn't we say that this exclusion of the child and his parents is a symbol not only of the world's rejection of this couple and their child but also of the child and his parents' rejection of the injustices of the world? They wouldn't enter the palaces of that day even if they had been invited, for they would not conform to their way of life which was anything but just and devout.

But we have to be careful here, for if we push this thought too far, we will end up contradicting the central meaning of this feast which is that God has chosen not to reject but rather to enter into our human lives by becoming human himself in Jesus. He entered the inn of humanity, and he shared everything with us in that inn

except our sinfulness. And by living in this inn in this sinless way he has opened up to us a new vision of the inn and ourselves, a vision in which people live together as brothers and sisters and learn to share with each other, a vision in which people even learn to put the needs of others person ahead of their own. If we can live in this new way, then Jesus' entrance into the inn of humanity has achieved its purpose. He has made us his brothers and sisters and given us a new way of living, one which will bring us to greater life here and hereafter.

Sisters and Brothers, let us walk in the light of the Lord Jesus.