

Faithful God Nick Mountfort Midnight 24 December, 2016

***Fill my words and this night with the light of your love.
In Jesus' name.***

Tonight we heard again those majestic words from John's Gospel: *The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never overcome it.*

At 5pm today we had our wonderful children's service. I've have been involved in putting together lots of children's Christmas services. Tonight we even had a back-up baby. But Sophie was so good we didn't need her.

One Christmas Service that stood out for me was one that we had done a lot of work on. To give weight to John's words that the light shines in the darkness, we had hidden a powerful light bulb under the manger of the newborn Jesus. All the other lights were turned off so that only the brightness of Jesus could be seen. But the boy controlling the lights got confused and all the lights went out. It was a tense moment, broken only by one of the shepherds saying in a loud stage whisper; "*Hey, you've switched off Jesus!*"

Many there were, and many there are who would like to switch off Jesus.

King Herod was jealous of this new king so he tried to hunt him down. When that failed, he killed all the boys to try and kill Jesus. Throughout his ministry, the Scribes and the Pharisees constantly plotted Jesus' downfall.

Unlike the Grinch, who had a heart two sizes too small, Jesus' heart of love was enormous.

Positively busting with love he embraced lepers, blessed children, healed on the Sabbath, empowered women, trusted tax collectors and told stories about good Samaritans. His focus constantly remained on others and He radically changed the world.

Jesus drew a crowd wherever He went. People clamoured just to touch his clothes in hopes to be healed. Time after time, He would look through the eyes and into the soul of that one person, and then touch their life with His sacrificial love. He would walk all day just to get to another village to reach the people there. He would go without eating because he was so preoccupied with reaching others. He would stay up all night interceding on behalf of the people he would minister to the next day. Then after washing his disciples' feet, he demonstrated the ultimate picture of

sacrificial love by giving His very life for those who did not deserve it. Even when he was dying, he asked God to forgive his torturers.

Even death did not put out his amazing heart of love. This is shown when he rose from death on the first Easter.

In our time and place I like to think of the tower of St Peter's being like a beacon of light in our community. Light shines as together we offer a whole portfolio of care for our community. Whether it's through the 52 staff doing 7,000 counselling sessions at Petersgate, the Youth Pathways helping young people get back on track, the ESOL class, the Mainly Music, the Care Bear team, the Women's Fellowships, the pre-school music, the nine rest homes we care for, or the Coffee and Chat, St Peter's shines light into our community.

Christmas night and the promise of light in the darkness it reminds us of, has always brought hope and comfort.

We in Canterbury know what it is to live through natural disasters. Forty two years ago tonight, so did the residents of Darwin.

When Cyclone Tracy hit on Christmas Eve in 1974, David Keynes' began an audio recording for his brother. It is the only known recording of the cyclone. It captures the chilling sounds of the storm coming closer and closer. Twenty seven kilometres away, the wind was cracking trees as they bent right over. "What a night," Mr Keynes can be heard saying on the tape and indeed it was. He described the sky being orange-coloured at about 11:15pm and water coming in through his roof and his windows 'like a waterfall'. He took cover in the bathroom as the roof was ripped off. With fear growing in his voice as the cyclone became stronger, Mr Keynes began singing.

What would you sing that could possibly give comfort on such a night?

His broken voice is recorded singing ... you guessed it ... Silent Night.

Later he explained that it was only the hope of that song that could get him through that night.

Now it's our turn. Are we going to allow the hope and love of this night and this Child born to us, to change our lives? Are we going to open the rough stables of our hearts to Jesus, or are we going to switch him off? Is Jesus the light of the world going to shine brightly in our lives transforming all our actions?

A long time ago on a dark night God realised we needed hope. And a Child was born to us; a Son was given to us.

There remains only one question, a question which you alone can answer.

Is the birth of this baby going to enlarge your heart, and fill the darkness of life with the light and the love of God ... or will you switch him off?