



The true light

that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

JOHN 1:9 (NIV)

December 2018

Dear Friends,

At a recent Bible Study, I said, "Christmas is coming." The class let out a groan. Someone said, "It feels like we just had Christmas." Another said, "We haven't had Thanksgiving yet!" And another said, "Christmas decorations were up at Starbucks before Halloween." Needless to say, no one was happy to hear that Christmas is coming.

Christmas and groaning have a long tradition, going back as far as the days before the birth of Christ. At that time, Rome occupied Israel. The Roman military kept the people in check through violent means. The religious authorities could not be trusted and collaborated with the oppressors. Groans rose from the people like the sad refrain of a cello.

It was in these circumstances that the birth of Jesus took place. In their suffering, the people hardly noticed. The only fanfare about his birth took place in the heavens; otherwise, it was a less than ordinary birth. His parents were poor, and he was born in a stable with a feeding trough for a crib. The only witnesses were a handful of outcast shepherds. And yet, in retrospect, this was God's reply to the groaning of God's people.

What was the meaning of God's response? Perhaps it is best captured in one feature of the Christmas Eve service, namely the Christ candle. Jesus' birth was light in the midst of darkness. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus the Christ so embodied the kindness, caring, and compassion of God that his followers were able to proclaim with confidence, "God is always with us."

As in the days preceding Jesus' birth, we may find ourselves at the edge of hopelessness, pushed to the limit by natural disasters, violence, and the deep divisions within our society. In this darkness, we light the Christ candle and, like him, strive to be light in the world. The gospel writer John expressed it best when he wrote, "*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*" (John 1:3b-5).

Wishing you the light of Christ,

Gary