

<sup>4</sup>What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. *John 1:4,5*

One thing that never ceases to amaze me is the sky at night. Close as we are to the city, we still have a wonderful view of the stars and planets on a clear night. The closest of the stars we are able to see is four light years away – meaning that it has taken four years for the light to travel to us. Others are hundreds, thousands, millions of light years away. This is all a reminder of the incredible scale of the universe of which we are but a small part. But there is also the fact that light, once emitted, travels through the darkness, pierces the void that is the darkness of outer space.

A few days ago, there was the winter solstice. On that day each year, the light of the rising sun shines right into the heart of the burial chamber of the passage grave at Newgrange – a place of death flooded with light.

Each year at Christmas we read from the opening chapter of St John's Gospel. John in his Gospel chooses not to dwell on the details of the birth of Jesus, choosing instead to reflect on the significance of Jesus, using images of light and darkness, a light that shines into the world, a light that no darkness can contain or control. Mark picks up on this theme of light, quoting from Isaiah as he speaks of the beginning of the ministry of Jesus:

the people who sat in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
light has dawned."

I just want to follow through on that theme of light.

Later on in John's Gospel, the writer tells us of Jesus speaking of himself in terms of light, 'I am the light of the world.' – as he prepares to heal a blind man, as he talks of lighting the path of those who follow. It is at this point that my mind turns to the rising sun shining into the deepest recesses of the burial chamber at Newgrange. The light of Christ shines into the deepest recesses of doubt, of despair.

But disciples are never there as simply spectators – Jesus calls them to be participants in his ministry. So Jesus speaks not only of himself as the light of the world, he calls his disciples to mediate something of that light in the situations in which they find themselves.

<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. *Matt 5:14-16*

Let your light shine before others. We who have received the light of Christ are called to be ones through whom the light of Christ shines in the world of today.

As the rising sun of the winter solstice shines into the deepest recesses of the burial mound at Newgrange, so the light of Christ shines into the deepest recesses of the pain, the doubts, the loneliness, the hurts of this broken and hurting world. It shines in someone visiting the neighbour next door who is sick, or lonely or recently bereaved; it shines in the nurse or chaplain sitting by a hospital bed with a family; it shines in the person who refuses to be vengeful in the face of some terrible wrong; it shines as you sit with someone as they

unburden a pain or regret. We would often remind ourselves that we are the hands, the feet, the lips of Christ in the world of today. We are ones through whom the light of Christ is to shine in the world of today.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

In every generation, there have been those through whom the light of Christ has shone in homes, in communities, in nations, bringing hope in the face of despair, peace in the face of turmoil. May we be ones through whom the light of Christ continues to shine in the world of today.