



THE RT. REV. STEVEN ANDREW MILLER, D.D.
BISHOP OF MILWAUKEE

"The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

Dear Friends in Christ,

My favorite Mass of the three Christ Masses for the feast of the Incarnation is the Mass on Christmas Day. (Like Easter, Christmas has three Eucharistic Propers from the ancient custom that priest were allowed to celebrate three masses on this day, rather than just one.) One of my earliest memories in worship was a Christmas Day service in my Grandpa and Grandma Miller's church. It was the first time I had ever seen a church so richly decorated with torches and garlands on each pew.

As I get older, I find I am most feed by the quiet simplicity of a service on Christmas Day and the more reflective nature of the lessons appointed. Instead of the birth narrative from Luke, the Gospel for this third mass is the prologue from John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God..." a Johannine echo of the creation story from Genesis written in the light of the Christ event, that is Jesus incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The verse that speaks to me most deeply is verse 5, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." I cling to that verse most especially this year. I cling to the confidence and the assurance it offers of God's reign in a year that seems more violent than any before. We see violence not only in the streets of our nation and around the world, we are pummeled by violence over the air waves from the mouths of pundits and politicians. If it were not for the confidence we have in God's promise in the Gospel, it would be very tempting to despair.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. The Greek word translated overcome is *kateleben* from *katalambano* which can also be translated seize, win, attain, or make one's own. The origin of the word has to do with coming in possession of an inheritance. What John is getting at is that darkness cannot inherit the light, it cannot make light its possession. Only the converse is true.

We gather this Christmas to celebrate the true Light which is Jesus Christ, the one who is the way, the truth, and the light. We celebrate that in Jesus God has overcome the darkness by the light which is in Christ. Christ's victory is a victory that is eternal, forever and ever world without end.

As I celebrate the Christ Mass, know that I will be holding each of you in my prayer. Cindy, Lauren, and Haley join me in wishing you a blessed Christmas.

In our Incarnate Lord,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Steven A. Miller".

The Rt. Rev. Steven A. Miller
Bishop of Milwaukee