

“New Day, New Year, New Life” – John 1:1-14 – Dec 30, 2007

Have you seen one of the latest and fun McDonald's® commercials on TV? It starts with a young man saying, “it was so ... orange, so ... bright ..” and the older adult with him responds, “it was morning!” The young man concludes, “Wow, I like it ...” Me too ... I like mornings.

Probably all of us have had the opportunity to see beautiful sunrises. Naturally enough I have seen some of my favourites at 35,000 feet from an airplane window. Other times I was treated to these beautiful vistas while driving, and yet others on warm coral beaches, watching the sun rise over the water. There's a kind of magic as the sky starts to lighten, and then the sun appears, and all too soon we're into the harsh glow of another day, with the magic stored away for another time.

But not all sunrises are associated in my mind with glorious beauty, great serenity, great peace. Many came only after a long night of sleepless agonizing filled with depression and anger. One unforgettable sunrise came as I was driving from Sept-Iles to Sudbury non-stop to visit my oldest son Jamie who was fighting for his life in the hospital after a very bad motorcycle accident.

I'm sure many of you have faced sunrises you'd rather not have faced, but I suspect you would agree with me that for the most part sunrises are a good thing. Especially now, as I continue to pile on the years, I wake up to face each new day with a grateful prayer of thanks to God – for being able to greet the new day, and even better to be able get out of bed and stand up!

At heart we are creatures of the day, happiest when we are not skulking about in the dark. Our biology incorporates a clock mechanism called circadian rhythm that runs roughly on a 24-hour cycle (that's what the word means ... from the Latin “circa” meaning “about”, and “diem” meaning “day”). That's why we suffer from jet lag ... the rapid transition by airplane across several time zones puts our body's clock out of whack with the sun, and it usually takes until halfway through the return homeward flight for our bodies to compensate, guaranteeing another round of jet lag when we get back home.

Our literature and culture reflects that sense of relief that people feel as the dawn lights up the eastern horizon – perhaps the best-known is the opening phrase in the American anthem, “Oh say can you see, by dawn's early light” referring to the emerging sight of a flag still waving after a long night of shelling. Even on a cloudy day, the light dispels the dark of night, and the fears we associate with the darkness. Mind you, even our nights are not all that dark, unless the power has gone off in a storm – street lights, house lights, car lights, even moon and star light provide us with some vision through the night. There is one place, however, where there is absolute darkness, a darkness so complete that you cannot see anything – and that is deep in a mine, when your helmet lamp goes out. There is no way to describe that utter, absolute lack of light except as the darkest dark you could ever imagine.

I don't know if the evangelist John ever worked in a mine, but his sense of the darkness into which light and life came seems to me that same kind of utter, absolute darkness. And into that darkness came the true light, the light of life, dispelling forever the darkness like the sun bursting over the horizon, chasing away the enigmatic shadows, bathing the whole cosmos in a blaze of glory. The feeling of relief when you turn your light back on, the incredible sense of relief of those who are rescued from absolute darkness as they are brought into the light are almost beyond words, but John captures some of it. “In him [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of all peoples.” John in a few words paints the complete contrast between the lifeless darkness and the gift of life in God he identifies as the light, the true light of Christ.

Light comes in many flavours and colours. There is the pleasant yellow-orange glow of a sunrise; there is the cold brightness of the full moon on a winter's night – illuminating but completely devoid of any warmth; there is the searing intense blistering light and heat of the noonday desert sun; there are the eerily haunting Northern Lights, wispy and transient; and there are the uncountable pretty but remote and distant lights of a star-filled night. John wants us to know that the true light that dispelled the darkness forever was neither remote nor cold nor deadly, but full of life and life abundant – so much so that it “became flesh and dwelt among us.” A warm and life-giving tender light filling a stable in Bethlehem, inviting shepherds and the rest of humanity to come and see this miracle of Emmanuel, God-with-us. A guiding and directing light acting as a beacon to draw wise men and not-so-wise men and women, kings and queens and paupers to hear the Word and see the light.

In his opening hymn of praise to the Word, to Christ Jesus, the evangelist John paints a vibrant and living scenario. This is no still-life picture of the birth of Jesus, the kind of beautiful scene that we see on the Christmas cards. Instead John gives us a dramatic opening to the gospel story, an opening that more than matches any of the spectacular movie intros such as that used in the Star Wars movies, or that classic opening scene in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* where the sedate sounds of the jungle are suddenly broken by the wheels of the train passing by, or the sudden appearance of Strelnikov's train that opens the second part of *Dr. Zhivago*. I'm sure you have favourite movies with equally dramatic opening scenes.

The common characteristic of such scenes – and this dramatic opening to John's gospel – is that of sudden change, of abrupt and significant transition. John gives us a picture of a sudden transition from darkness into light, echoing the proclamation in Genesis “and God said let there be light, and there was light, and you could see for miles.” Actually, Genesis doesn't have the part about seeing for miles – I added that – but the implication is there. A sudden dramatic transition from darkness into light. But there's more, much more, to that transition than God simply flicking on a cosmic light switch. John makes it clear that with Christ's coming to dwell among us, to share in flesh and blood with us, this transition heralds other changes as well: darkness into light is paralleled by the move from death into life, from a state of sin into grace, from past into future.

It seems appropriate in light of John's words about the Word, the true light, coming to live with us and change everything that New Year's Day follows so closely upon Christmas. As we fondly remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus and hear these words we are reminded that our lives have been changed by that birth. The arrival of Jesus signaled a new day for all humankind, a new day and a new way of reconciliation with God, a new way of life and living. New Year's provides us with a focal point in the midst of that reflection to make the move from past to future. How will we make that move? How will we be guided into the coming year? Hopefully we will be guided by the same transitions John has laid out for us – from light into darkness, from death into life, from sin into grace. We have the comfort of knowing, as those who call themselves children of God in Christ, that our paths will be illuminated by the light of Christ. We will not be abandoned by God into utter darkness but drawn towards the light of God's love in Christ. The coming year provides us with yet more unfolding future to dwell rejoicing in the abundant life given to us in Christ, life rich and rewarding, made possible through the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The birth of Jesus has provided humanity with a new day in the history of humankind. We stand poised to enter a new year bathed in the light of God's love, enriched with new life in his grace. Let us rejoice throughout the coming year, giving thanks to God in all things.