

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.”* The light that shines out in the darkness is the light of Christ breaking in upon a world shrouded in darkness and gloom, overcoming the darkness that is ignorance of God, relieving the gloom of despair that enfolds the world. Christ is the glory of God and where God's glory shines, the light of truth breaks in upon human hearts. Christ is the light of God's love in him there is no darkness. The love that Christ gives brings hope to men and women everywhere and where people put their faith in Christ, charity springs forth as an active loving concern for the weak and the suffering, the downtrodden and the destitute, the lonely and the afraid.

The light of Christ is the source of our life because it is the source of our knowledge of God. The light of Christ contrasts blindingly with the falsehoods of men and the darkness of the ignorance. The light of Christ gives us life because it illuminates for us that narrow and difficult path of faith that guides us safely through the treacherous swamp of sin, death and decay. The light of Christ warms us from within because it ignites our hearts with the spark of God's love. Where there is love, Christ's light shines forth illuminating hearts and minds with hope; where there is hatred, the world remains in darkness. In that stable in Bethlehem there appeared a great light, a light that the world had long waited for. It was the light of the Christ child lying in a manger, the light by which God chose to show his glory – the glory of his unconditional, sacrificial love, a love that gives itself away, stripping itself of all its grandeur in order to teach us how to love as we ought. That light from Bethlehem has never been extinguished. In every age it has touched the hearts, and minds and souls of men and women of good will. We have but to look at the lives of the saints – Francis of Assisi and Claire, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, John Paul II and Mother Teresa – to see the light that Christ enkindles in every believing heart.

The angels sang *“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will.”* The peace that the angels sing of is the peace that flows from the heart of the Prince of Peace, whose reign is one of endless peace. It is the peace of good

will shown towards men. It is the peace of men who open their hearts to God. God loves everyone because all are his creation, but some have closed their hearts to him; in some there is no window into their soul by which the light of Christ may shine, no door into their heart by which his peace may enter. These are doomed to remain always in darkness because they think that they do not need God, nor do they want him. However, there are others, who are no less wretched and sinful, but who seek his light and experience his love. These are the ones who are waiting for Christ, the ones who realize his goodness and who eagerly seek his light. Into their expectant hearts God's light can enter, and with it, his peace.

*“This will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”* God's signs to us are simple, so that we might understand with our hearts. The child we welcome is a sign of hope for the whole human family; a sign of peace for those suffering from conflict; a sign of freedom for the poor and the oppressed; a sign of mercy for those caught in the vicious cycle of sin; a sign of love and consolation for those who are lonely and abandoned. God makes himself small for us, because he is too big, too grand, too glorious for us to comprehend; his brilliance would blind us, his unconditional love would overpower us. So he comes to us as a humble, defenseless child in need of our love. By his humility he takes away our fear of his greatness, by his helplessness he takes away our fear of his power. God makes himself small so that we can embrace him and welcome him into our hearts, so that he can teach us how to love as he loves, for we do not know how to love as we ought. All he asks of us is our love; he wants nothing from us other than our love. Let us therefore join with the Blessed Virgin Mary as she sits by the manger, let us adore our savior and give him all of our love.