

*Christmas Liturgy  
For the Midnight Mass  
December 25, 2011*

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*The Catholic Community of  
St. John the Evangelist and Blessed Sacrament*

*Prelude*

*We warmly welcome all who have come today to celebrate this glorious Feast.*

*We welcome the stranger, the traveler and guest!*

*We welcome our students home from college for a good winter's rest!*

*We welcome parishioners who moved far away but join us today as old friends and guests!*

*We welcome all who have not been active of late in their Catholic faith and hope they will find new hope and inspiration this Christmas to come back again and again!*

*We welcome our faithful parishioners, loyal and true; may the Lord bless you for all you do!*

*Welcome to all! May our gathering this day gladden our hearts and deepen our bonds. We are, after all, one People of God, redeemed by the Light.*

*May we walk by the Light and live by the Light, together in love.*

*Christmas Blessings!*

## *HOMILY*

Welcome on this holiest of nights. I want to begin with a story about a young man named Marty. Marty was a bright, lively eight-year-old who suffered from a minor disability. He was deaf in one ear. He lived in a rural community of farms and fences. Marty's mom, Diane, was proud of her son. She knew he had a kind and loving heart.

Several weeks before Christmas one year, Marty shared a secret with his mother. He had been doing extra chores and saving up his allowance to buy a Christmas present, a pocket compass for his best friend, Kenny. Kenny was being raised by a single mom and life for their family was a daily struggle just to acquire the most basic needs of food and clothing.

Marty's mom doubted that Kenny's mom would allow Kenny to accept a gift if he couldn't give one in return. Marty argued with his mother and finally said, "But what if it was a secret? What if they never found out who gave it?" Diane finally relented.

So, on Christmas Eve, Diane watched her son walk out the door, cross the pasture and slip beneath the electric fence on his mission of kindness.

Marty raced up to Kenny's door and pressed the doorbell. Then he ran down the steps and across the yard so he wouldn't be seen. Suddenly the electric fence loomed in front of him. He could not avoid it. The shock knocked him to the ground and he gasped for breath. Slowly he got up and stumbled home.

When he arrived home, Diane treated the blister on Marty's face caused by the electric fence then put him to bed. That night, as Diane tucked Marty in, she silently gave God an earful for allowing her son to be hurt when he was performing a good deed.

The next day, however, Kenny came to the front door excitedly talking about his new compass. Amazingly, Marty, who you'll remember was deaf in one ear, seemed to hear Kenny talking with both of his ears. A few weeks later, a school nurse confirmed what Diane had suspected: Marty's hearing in his deaf ear had been completely restored. Though doctors said it might have been from the electric fence, Diane believed it was a Christmas miracle.

Christmas is a night for miracles. It is a magical night of wonder and faith. Look into the eyes of our children or grandchildren. You'll know what I mean.

How good it is to hear the prophetic words of Isaiah, *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.... For to us a child is born. To us a son is given, and upon his shoulders dominion rests."*

All of us know what it is to walk in darkness at some time in our lives. Darkness comes in many forms—loneliness, pain, grief, confusion, anxiety, worry, heartache. All these emotions seem to be intensified at Christmas.

The shepherds out on a Judean hillside knew about darkness in a way that many of us city folk cannot. There was no artificial lighting in their world. The only light came from the stars above. So you can imagine how startled they were to be suddenly surrounded by a great light. Luke tells an angel appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The glory of the Lord is a wonderful thing, but when you are not expecting it, it must have seemed like an alien invasion. Luke tells us they were terrified.

But the angel reassured them,

*"Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David, a savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find him wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."*

It is no accident that Christmas falls just after the shortest day of the year. December 21 is usually the shortest day of the year, meaning that it is the day we receive the least amount of sunlight. But at the darkest time of the year, our world turns a corner. From today on, there will be a little more sunlight each day. Christmas reminds us that light is coming into our world, in a physical sense as well as a spiritual one.

In the darkness, there is a light that shines, and that light is the Babe born in Bethlehem. As he walked among us, Jesus says, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."*

There is a poem, actually a hymn, written by Cardinal Newman while crossing the Mediterranean in 1833, just before he joined the Catholic Church:

*Lead, kindly light, amid th' encircling gloom, lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene; one step enough for me.*

If you are experiencing any darkness in your life right now, there is a light dawning, and that light is an infant born to be our Savior.

Rejoice, your light has come.

*Lead, kindly light, amid th' encircling gloom, lead Thou me on!*

*St. John the Evangelist*

*∞140<sup>th</sup> Jubilee ∞*

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