

John 1:1-14 The light in the darkness

Over the last ten days, since the Bondi Beach shooting, there has been much talk about light in the darkness. For Jewish people, lighting the Chanukah candles has had a deeper significance this year, and people of many backgrounds have chosen to light and display candles as a way of remembering the victims, and showing solidarity with the Jewish people of our city.

These last days have been dark days indeed. And lighting candles has been a symbolic way of standing against the darkness so many of us are experiencing at the moment. For many people, Chanukah celebrations will never be the same again. Or visiting Bondi Beach will never be the same again. Or going to any large gathering will cause fear.

We can all relate to this idea of dark times, can't we? We've all been scared of the dark at some time in our lives. We know the feelings of uncertainty, fear, loneliness, despair and hopelessness that the darkness conveys.

Christmas is one of the most joyous Christian festivals, but: the day after – as you might remember from the song, Good King Wenceslas, is the feast of Stephen – when we remember the first Christian Martyr. And the 28th of December, is traditionally Holy Innocents Day, when we remember that King Herod ordered the death of all the boy children in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus. And Christmas is the start of the journey that would lead Jesus to his death at Calvary...

But the message of Christmas is hope for people who are in dark places. We heard the prophecy of Isaiah, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2a)

Sometimes it's easy to see the light, and sometimes it's hard. Sometimes it's one small candle burning against a moonless night, but the wonderful thing about the light that Jesus brings is that the darkness has not overcome it. Indeed cannot overcome it.

If God seems far away, don't despair - we don't have to try and find our way to God, because God reached out to us - in that first Christmas, God reached out to us. To us all.

Jesus says later in John's gospel that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whomsoever believes in him shall not die, but have eternal life.

God gave his son to us not to make us his slaves or command us to obey him, but to reach out to us, to shine light into our darkness, to share his love with us.

As we heard in our last reading tonight, John's gospel refers to Jesus as the source of life, and it tells us that his life brought light to people... The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out...

Wherever you might be this Christmas, whether you are overjoyed by the festive season, or saddened by the memories of Christmas' past, or despairing for the future, the light of Jesus shines for you.

At Christmas we remember the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem, and we see nativity scenes showing the holy family, the shepherds and the wise men bathing in the glow of heavenly light... though the reality of a baby born in a stable in first century Judea might not have been quite so idyllic. And of course, things soon darkened for Jesus: Herod set out to kill him and the family fled to Egypt. And when Jesus returned and began his ministry, he was rejected by his own people. We remember too, from the Easter story, that Jesus was conspired against, betrayed, rejected, denied, humiliated, beaten and crucified. Jesus has been to the dark places.

But the darkness couldn't overcome him. And he rose again.

And the light of Jesus still shines for us in the dark places of our lives. We only have to turn to him and accept his light into our lives.

John's gospel reassures us that the light shines in the dark, and the darkness has never mastered it. (John 1:5)

The sad fact is that not everyone has recognised Jesus, and for two thousand years many have chosen to turn away from the peace he came to bring: As John's gospel tells us: He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:11-12)

The offer, to become one of those children of God is still there for each of us. To put our trust in him and become God's children. No matter where we are. No matter what our background. No matter if we have rejected that offer before, or have drifted away...

The final verse of our reading from John gives us the essence of the Christmas story: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word indeed became flesh, and shone a light into a dark world. A light that cannot be overcome, and that still shines for each one of us. This Christmas, into 2026, and always.

Amen.