

Dear People of St. John's,

I've just finished reading an Epiphany meditation by the German Protestant theologian, Jurgen Moltmann on a passage from Isaiah 9 that we know so well:

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined....  
For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

I wish I could just print Moltmann's entire meditation out for you to read (and I'll happily make you a copy if you ask). He's writing about the evils of the world, the physical and mental anguish he lived with as a guilt-wracked German soldier in an Allied prison camp, the prisoners and exiles and displaced persons in our world today, the political sniping and our obsession with military might and violence. Then he speaks of the Child, the Wonderful Councilor, the Prince of Peace and he says, "The kingdom of peace comes through a child and liberation is bestowed on the people who become as children: disarmingly defenseless, disarming through their defenselessness, and making others defenseless because they themselves are so disarming."

Moltmann's words are radically different from how we envision a means to peace. Our means to peace is always, it seems, through the triumph of might. Yet Moltmann insists "This child will become the liberator for the new world of peace. That is why his rule means life, not death; peace, not war; freedom, not oppression. This sovereignty lies on the defenseless, innocent and hopeful shoulders of this child."

Certainly that is the Christian message. Certainly that is what we confess as our faith—not that Jesus was a ruler who ruled by his might, but a man who saved by his love. And it's easy, I think, to lose sight of that when we are engulfed in and surrounded by a broken world of political hatred, religious extremism, violence and homeless exiles in every land.

Yet the season of Epiphany calls us to faith. It calls us to look for that pinprick of brightness that illumines us as we walk in darkness. We are promised that the darkness will not overcome the brightness of the Word made flesh. And so we are continually called to hope, to faith, to work and to prayer, even as we find ourselves walking in a cloud of night.

The words to Jaroslav Vajda's Christmas hymn will take us bravely into Epiphany where we will hear the echoes of the herald angels' news inspiring us to faithfulness and trust in the child, born unto us.

"Before the marvel of this night, adoring, fold your wings and bow,  
Then tear the sky apart with light and with your news the world endow.  
Proclaim the birth of Christ and peace that fear and death and sorrow cease:  
Sing peace, sing peace, sing gift of peace. Sing peace, sing gift of peace!"

May the blessings of Christ sustain you this Epiphany season,  
--Pastor Jo Page