

# Into a New Year January 2, 2005

## Carlisle and Kilbride United Churches

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

There are some years when it seems easy to step across the divide between the old year and the new.

We spend New Year's Eve with friends, in a festive atmosphere, the evening building to the climactic countdown toward midnight and the first moment of a new year.

Not so long ago, it was even the first moment of a new millennium, and we were in awe of that transition that so few people ever experience.

It seemed a hopeful new beginning for the world

as on television and the internet,

we followed the year 2000 as it arrived in countries around the world.

But this season we have been horrified

by the devastation of an earthquake off the coast of Indonesia

early on the day after Christmas

and the tsunamis created by that quake

which tore up beaches and into fishing villages and through tourist destinations,

taking thousands and thousands of lives,

leaving the survivors in many lands heartbroken and homeless

and other people scrambling to help.

We have been shaken by the scale of the death and destruction.

The darkness seems to prevail

Since the beginning of the new millennium

our world hasn't exactly turned over a new leaf.

The unexpected violence of September 11, 2001

was followed by a unilateral and unprovoked attack by the USA

on Iraq, a war that has killed thousands of Iraqis and

hundreds of American soldiers

with no resolution in sight, despite the elections coming up soon.

Progress that the world had made –

treaties, weapon reduction agreements,

the role of the United Nations and working in consultation with other nations –

many of these have lost ground

and our world seems less secure, less just.

The darkness seems to prevail

It is true that we are touched on personal levels also.

In Carlisle and Kilbride, we are affected by losses.

People in our congregation, our community, among our families and friends have died. Three within the last week for Carlisle.

Some are coping with illness, or with surgeries;  
others with life-changing circumstances.  
We are acquainted with the darkness of our lives.  
We know the professional jealousies and competitiveness.  
We know the subtle temptations of pride.  
We know the self-absorption that comes  
as a result of believing that we – and we alone – are all the matters.  
We know the comfort of hiding from the issues of our society and of our world  
within the womb of our homes.

Yes, the darkness seems to prevail –  
in our world and in our individual lives.  
The darkness seems to prevail.  
And so, we must ask again,  
does the light still shine in this darkness?  
Or, has the darkness finally overcome it?  
How do, how can we, step into this new year?

The prologue of John's gospel is interesting  
because it never claims that the darkness succumbs to the light.  
It is interesting because these beginning words of John  
claim only that the light goes on shining amid the darkness,  
and the darkness does not overcome it – or master it.  
The author knew that we are a people in darkness.  
But a people, too, who claim that there is a light.  
A people not rescued from darkness.  
But a people given a glimmer of light.

This fall I saw an Italian film about a group of children.  
It is called "I'm not Scared" –  
the kind of brave thing kids will say  
when, in fact, they really are terrified  
and the movie had several of those heart-stopping moments.  
One frightening moment for all of us happened  
when a boy stumbled upon an abandoned well,  
and peered down into the darkness  
only to see something move in the shadows.  
I think I would have fled never to return.  
But the boy was drawn back to that darkness  
and, with his courage in both hands, again explored the darkness of the pit.  
Eventually he realized that the thing that moved at the bottom  
was a boy – a boy his own age.  
The boy had been in the darkness for several days  
so that the slightest light caused pain and he thought he was blind.  
He also believed that he was dead  
and that the boy who lowered himself into the darkness  
was, in fact, an angel.  
In this movie, the darkness of the well

becomes an image for other forms of darkness in the children's world –  
the darkness of poverty,  
the darkness of family violence,  
the darkness that leads to kidnapping a helpless child to gain money.  
Yet even with all that darkness around him,  
this one child persists in confronting his fear of the dark  
to reach out to the boy in the well.  
He faces the evil that he recognizes has kidnapped this child.  
He insists that the boy in darkness begin to open his eyes and see light.  
And when there is light, even a squinty-eyed crack of light,  
there is hope that hold of darkness can be broken.  
The powers of the darkness cannot prevail.

Just this week, a young woman wrote of her experience  
driving through a mountain pass in California  
on her way to catch an airplane.  
She hit dense fog on the road  
and soon what would have been a quick trip  
slowed to a crawl because she could not see the road in front of her.  
A couple of vehicles passed her.  
Another came along behind her and stayed there,  
light from their headlights bouncing back off the fog  
and making her vision even more difficult.  
Soon she came upon the two vehicles that had passed her,  
creeping along the winding road.  
It seemed impossible that she would make it to the airport in time.  
In the darkness of the fog, in fact,  
she began to hope that she would simply make it to safety!  
But then ahead of the two vehicles in front of her,  
she made out the well-lit outline of a big truck.  
Together, the four vehicles followed the truck,  
forming a kind of convoy in the thick fog.  
She said that the truck-driver seemed to know the road so well  
that he was driving slowly, but steadily,  
into the darkness of the fog  
and the others were able to follow in safety.  
Eventually, the pass road descended out of the fog  
and she picked up speed and actually made her airplane.  
The plane took off and soon broke through the clouds into sunshine.  
As she looked down, she thought about how hard it was,  
in the midst of that dense fog,  
to imagine other places where the sun shone.  
And how hard it was to trust enough to relax,  
to see the beauty of those moments,  
to give thanks for the steady leadership of the truck driver.  
Certainly she had encountered darkness on that journey.  
But she also experienced the glimmer of light ahead of her  
and because of that glimmer of light,

the darkness did not prevail.

On the evening news last night,  
amid the coverage of the days' events in the areas destroyed by the tsunamis  
one Indonesian man spoke to a reporter:

"I have to believe that from this will come a new beginning."

In his voice, in his statement,  
in the darkness of this human tragedy,  
there was a glimmer of light.

People in countries around the world, citizens as well as governments,  
are responding to this situation of need,

working together to find ways that resources and people  
can be spread out and used most effectively.

In the darkness of a competitive world,  
there is a glimmer of light.

So often in our lives and in human history  
the darkness does seem to prevail  
but we know there is a source of light that does not fail us.  
And we pray and grope for the faith to discern its light  
amid the darkness.

This day, this new year, is no different  
than that day in which the prologue of the Gospel of John was written.

The darkness remains even today.

But amid the darkness a glimmer of light.

Amid the darkness a light from a manger many years ago.

Amid the darkness a Christmas promise that this light still shines in the darkness.

Amid the darkness, the light of the word made flesh for our salvation  
in a tiny baby.

And we trust that glimmer!

So it is that we can step into a new year.

"The light goes on shining in the darkness! And the darkness does not overcome it."

John 1: 1 - 14

Rev. Diane Blanchard