

Sermon New Zealand

First of all I want to thank you for inviting me and my wife to join the celebration of Bishop Monrad.

As a bishop I have the honor of being bishop in the diocese of Lolland-Falster - bishop Monrad's old diocese - and my wife and I have lived in Monrad's house for more than 6 years. So for us there's no getting away from Bishop Monrad. He had the bishop's Residence built in 1850, and it was also Monrad who arranged for several of the rooms to be painted with beautiful wall and ceiling decorations. The Bishop's Residence is a house full of life and soul. And so is the garden.

The 10,000 m² garden makes a beautiful setting for the buildings. And at the far end of the garden lies the "Bishop's Hill" which is surrounded by rocks engraved with the names of the 18 Lolland-Falster bishops. In the hill there's a very attractive and exciting grotto. When the soil, excavated in connection with the building of the new Bishop's Residence, was being removed, Monrad saw it as an opportunity to have a grotto built for his children. The brickwork is beautifully executed, and there is a 10 m long passage leading into the grotto.

And from this I have brought you a wonderful picture. It is taken from inside the grotto, and we are looking out into the garden; out into the sun and the day. I have decided to use this photo in my Christmas greetings for the pastors and church members followed by two verses from Luke chapter 1, saying: "...the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death..."

This photo is a very fine illustration of the Advent. The door is open, the light gets in, and there is new hope. The dark does no longer have all the power - the light is shining in the darkness - the darkness is behind us, and the light before us - but it hasn't yet got all the power.

It is dawn. Daybreak.

This is what advent means. Jesus is coming to Jerusalem - riding on a donkey or a colt. He is humble, no one can see that this should be the son of God - except those who believe that this is the Messiah. This is what the Messiah looks like, this is the way that he will enter Jerusalem. "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

As you see: the door is open. This is in short the Gospel. Now the door is open into heaven. In Genesis we hear about the fall of Man. After God drove man out, he placed

on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flaming back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. The door was closed - and the entrance to Paradise was blocked.

But now the day has come so we no longer have to live in darkness. God has sent his own son to the world. The light is shining into our world, and we now have new hope. In Acts chapter 3 Peter says in his Sermon: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that time of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you - even Jesus."

Turn to God. Turn to the light - the times of refreshing has come from the Lord. Now we can breathe again.

Today we hear about Jesus who entered Jerusalem. So he is also doing today. Not exactly Jerusalem - but entering our hearts.

As Monrad says in a Sermon:

"Today the Lord wants to enter your heart. The crowds received him, they spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Isn't there something in your heart that might be compared to the crowds' reaction? Don't you have a nice and precious memory, which might greet the Savior as you are greeting an old faithful friend? Think about it! Don't you have such a memory? Can you not remember a moment in your life, in which your heart has been easy and happy by thinking of your Saviour? Has it never happened to you, that it felt as if he was quite near and wiped your tears away from your eyes saying: "Don't cry!" ..Have you never had a moment, in which it has occurred to you, what a blessing it is for your soul, that you have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit - that you have become a child of the hope and of the Promised Land. So now in this moment I urge you to remember these light and precious memories, let them live in your mind again and let their voices join the great shout of joy from the crowds and from the living and departed generations: "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

So on this day we will - together with the late bishop Monrad - praise the Lord who is coming to the world to light up every soul, and to disperse the darkness in all our minds.

The light has a wonderful power. A small light is enough to lighten up a big room. A small light is enough to show us the direction when it is dark. So is the Christian hope. It is a light that God has sent to the world, and when we receive the light, when we let the hope live in us, it will dispel the darkness. The darkness is still here, we still have our troubles and worries in our lives. Jesus is not telling us that from now there will be only light in our lives. He doesn't promise us a life without suffering.

On the contrary! He predicted the burdens and suffering of his disciples in the world. But he promised them, on the other hand, that they should never be alone. He will be with them and with us. As Jesus is saying in Matthew chap. 11:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus is humble. He is standing in front of us. He is knocking at the door. The only thing we have to do is to open our heart for him and let him in.

This is in short what faith is about. Monrad says several times in his sermons and other books and articles: “It is in the power of all human beings to resist God. With our free will it is possible for us to resist God, to close our hearts, our souls and minds to him.” There is another one who has once said that: despite all our endless noise - it is within man’s power to put God into the silence.

Jesus is humble. He wants us to invite him. But when he first gets into our hearts and lives - everything will be changed. He will chase away the dark. He will be in search of every single dark room and small corner in our souls - and he will drive out the dark. As we hear just after the triumphal Entry, when Jesus comes into the temple: “He drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturns the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves”

This is a parable of what happens when Jesus enters a soul. This house should be a house of prayer. This house is mine. I don’t want any dark spot or room here.

So opening our hearts to Jesus is not just a peaceful feeling - It starts a battle between dark and light. But rest assured: the dark no longer has any power.

The light shall win. Death will be defeated. And he will give us peace, joy and eternal life.

This is our Christian hope. This is the light that we - on this first day in Advent - invite into our hearts.

Holy Spirit! Be our guest. Light up our spirits, like when the rosy dawn breaks through the gloom and darkness of the night. Let every dry and withered heart be refreshed by the dew thou sendest from heaven, thou, our Father. Lord. Hear our Prayer.

Amen