

Today at 10:03 the planet earth went through its winter *solstice* –

And we *casually* refer to it as the *shortest* day of the *year*.

How *fitting* that we celebrate the light of the *World*

Entering into our human condition in the wake of one of its *darkest* days –

In just a few *days* – on Dec. 25th – Christmas *Day*.

In our *increasingly* secular world,

We *still* get our Christmas *vacations* from school,

And even the *stores* will take a brief pause on the day *itself*.

For *many* it's all about *shopping* – *buying* and *selling*.

And for *others* it's just an excuse to get some time *away* from their labors

And to self-*indulge*.

But for the child of *faith* –

It's a time to *cherish* –

Because it's the time that *God* entered into the world as one of *us* –

God-with-us – *Emmanuel*.

All *three* readings today try to *stir* our hearts to place our *trust* in this very *personal* God.

To trust in *Him* more than our *own* desires to be in *charge*.

To trust in *Christ* as our light –

Especially when things seem *darkest*.

At the *end* of the day,

There's a bit of the *primordial child* in *each* of us –

Who *fears* the dark –

Fears the *unknown* –

Fears *circumstances* that put us on the *defensive*.

Our *impulse* is to circle the *wagons*!

And to *compete* like – *it's every man for himself!*

Or we calculate – making *alliances* –

Placing our trust in *worldly* power over the power of God's *love* –

Only to *lose* our true life's *joy* and *satisfaction*.

But *who* is happy living *alone* --

Living in a protective *bunker* as if it's a *tomb*?

We are *made* for relationship –

To take a *chance* on love –

To *let* our guard down for the *right* reasons.

For *God* to rule our hearts,

Rather than caving in to the tyrants of *fear* and *pride*.

In the *first* reading, King *Ahaz* of *Judah* *refused* to open his heart to God –

He *rejected* God's voice in the prophet *Isaiah*.

Out of fear and pride he *rejected* God.

He allied himself with foreign powers that would ultimately *destroy* Jerusalem.

In this Christmas time,

May we take *advantage* of the ability to take a *pause* in our busy-ness –

Take a short pause –

Tune *out* all the things that press in on us and *distract* us –

And wind us *up* in our fears and self-centeredness.

And *choose* to use that time to turn to *God*.

Let *down* our defenses –

Be open –

Let *Him* in –

Give Him your fears and worries and preoccupations.

Give Him your *hopes* and *dreams*.

But then, *listen* to Him.

Obedience to God is the often *hard* choice to *listen* to Him who knows us *best*.

But St. *Paul* tells us to choose *wisely*.

I think of the old *Indianna Jones and the Last Crusade*.

Evil men were after the Holy *Grail* –

The cup of everlasting *life*.

And the old knight *warned* the Nazi not to be taken *in* by *glitz* and a lust for *power*.

The Nazi lived more in fear of *death* rather than love of *life*.

He chose a *false* cup – the cup of *pride* – drinking a *fatal* poison.

But *Indianna*, *risked* death in *love* of life.

And God *restored* his father to *health*.

May we *Choose* wisely.

Listen to God above all the other *noise* in the world.

Be open to receive the love of the Child Jesus as the king of our hearts.

And we shall be *truly* free –

Most *authentically* – *ourselves*.

Something will be king of our hearts –

So let it be *Christ Jesus* –

Who *became* vulnerable for *us* as that poor little babe in the manger.

Joseph and *Mary* placed all their trust in God.

They *listened*.

And they *gave* their hearts for *Jesus* as their savior.

They *defied* the rule of laws,

That could have led to Mary being *stoned* to death in the name of righteousness.

And they *listened* to God who encourages *each* of us:

Be not afraid.

*I'm **with** you.*

Trust in *me*.

I love you.

You are *precious* in my eyes.

I have *called* you by *name*.

So, *when* it seems too *difficult* to *listen* to God,

Do it all the more *intently*.

Choose wisely – and Jesus' light *will* scatter *any* darkness that entraps us.

Choose to listen to His Word.

Choose to be fed by His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

Choose to *live* by *His* compassion for the *least* among us –

Embodied in the baby *Jesus* – *God who **saves** us* –

Our *Emmanuel* – *God with us* – ***always***.