

LIGHT OVER DARKNESS

December 25, 2025

(Christmas Day)

READINGSⁱ

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

REFLECTION

(Rev. Toby Keva)

When I was a little boy, I used to watch the night sky with my friend. We would pretend that we were accomplished astronomers and we would talk, and talk, and talk about planets and stars in space. Somehow, in that moment, it felt as if we had left behind planet earth altogether and visited the other galaxies in the vast universe.

The Bible reading for this year's Christmas Day from John's Gospel does something similar to us. Now, the story of Jesus' birth in John's Gospel is very different from the stories of Jesus' birth that we hear in the other Gospels in the Bible, namely Matthew and Luke. Unlike the stories in the other Gospels where Jesus is born in a town in Judea called, Bethlehem, John's nativity story takes us to a more cosmic landscape.

Indeed, John begins his Gospel by saying, "in the beginning". The last time we hear this phrase in the Bible is in the book of Genesis—the very first book of the Bible—that narrates the beginning of God's creation of the world. So, here, John proclaims that Jesus' origin is found not only in ancient Judea, but way beyond it—even before the beginning of the world.

In the opening part of his book, John uses two images to describe the divine origin and identity of Jesus. The first is the 'Word', or *Logos* (λόγος) in Greek, which means logic or reason or wisdom. So, according to John, Christ is God's wisdom or the logic that creates the world and everything in it.

The second image is 'light'.

"What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the *light* of all people.

The *light* shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overtake it.”
(John 1:3-5 NRSV)

Now, I can understand why John felt the need to include these words in the prologue of his book: everywhere we look in our world—then and today—we see evidences of how it is actually darkness that often has the upper hand over light, not the other way around.

This fear was confirmed, once again, when two gunmen opened fire at innocent people in Bondi, killing 15 people, men and women, young and old. And it happened during the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, which is also known as the Festival of Light! Once again, one would be forgiven to see this as another proof that it is darkness that can claim victory over light.

Yet, it was in this very moment—the moment when our faith in the goodness of humanity was shaken to the core—that we witnessed an ordinary man who did an extraordinary thing in the most extraordinary event.

Ahmed al-Ahmed, a humble fruit-seller who moved to Australia from Syria in 2006, inspired the entire nation when he charged towards one of the gunmen and disarmed him altogether! After the incident, I heard a gun expert saying that, in that kind of situation, even someone with a gun would have thought twice before confronting the gunman!

Ahmed had no weapon with him when he tried to disarm the gunman. His act of bravery was thus exceptional as much as it was selfless! Today, he is rightly celebrated as a national and even international hero. He was simply the very best of us in the worst of time.

Yet, we would be remiss if we think that it was only his courage that defined the moment; it was also defined by his *compassion*!

After Ahmed seized the gun and the terrorist was lying helplessly on the ground, he had every chance to kill or, at least, maim the terrorist. Instead, Ahmed put the gun away under a tree. His act of kindness, however, resulted in him being shot multiple times by the other gunman who was still active.

One of the most senior police officers in the country once tried to explain the reason why Ahmed did not shoot the gunman when he had the chance. He believed that Ahmed didn't kill the terrorist simply because of his humanity. See, after Ahmed seized the gun, the gunman was harmless. He posed no threat to Ahmed. And, because of that, Ahmed showed mercy towards him!

Indeed, Ahmed's father said that he did what he did because he was moved by his sentiment, conscience, and humanity.ⁱⁱ Ahmed himself said that his target was just to take the gun from the terrorist and to stop him from killing another human being.ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, his goal was to stop people being killed and not to take life himself.

What a contrast!

On one side were father and son who showed no mercy whatsoever towards their innocent victims; who shot indiscriminately at vulnerable people, including a 10-year-old girl who was simply there to have fun with her family. Their evil act had no limit.

On the other side was Ahmed, during his coffee run, who showed compassion even to the person who had just done one of the worst evil acts in Australia!

Now, it is easier for anyone, how is caught in that kind of situation, to exact revenge; to be like the man—we see in one of the video footages—who rushed to one of the then motionless gunman to kick his head! It is easier to fight evil with evil.

It is way harder to be like Ahmed al-Ahmed; to show compassion even to someone who had just committed evil. But, because of his bravery and compassion, Ahmed showed to us that—contrary to the other evidences—darkness *cannot* overcome light.

Now, many make a big deal about Ahmed's identity as a Muslim. But, really, his religion is irrelevant. The prologue of John's Gospel tells us why it is irrelevant when it makes this bold proclamation:

“All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was *the light of all people*.”
(John 1:3-4 NRSV)

Indeed, all come into being through Christ: all beings, all people—no exception! Which means that Christ is the “light of all people” of all colours and creeds: Muslims, Jews, Christians, religious, non-religious.

“The true light, which enlightens *everyone*,
was coming into the world.”
(John 1:9 NRSV)

As the twentieth-century English mystic, Caryl Houselander, once said,
“Christ is everywhere;
in Him every kind of life has a meaning
and has an influence on every other kind of life.”^{iv}

Friends, all of us have the light of Christ within us, whether we know it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not.

Ahmed al-Ahmed may not be a Christian. Yet, for me, he exemplifies Christ who refused to exact revenge on his enemies who crucified him on the cross. As a Christian, I can only explain his brave and self-less action by saying that, in that very moment, the divine light in Ahmed shone so bright that it dispelled the darkness around him.

On hospital bed, recovering from his gunshot wounds, Ahmed al-Ahmed said this message to all of us: “Stand with each other, all human beings, and forget everything bad, and keep going to save lives.”

On this Christmas Day, let us all go back to our home, our community, our workplace and do what our hero tells us to do: to stand with each other and save lives. In other words, to become, like John the Baptist, a witness to the divine light within us; to show to the others around us how light can and will overcome darkness; how compassion can and will overcome hatred; how love can and will overcome evil.

Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you ever witnessed a moment when goodness overcomes evil, when compassion overcomes hatred, when the light in people's heart overcomes the darkness in it?
2. What can you do to make the same thing a reality in your life?

ⁱ New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition of the Bible.

ⁱⁱ *'He saw the victims and acted', father tells BBC of 'hero' son who tackled Bondi gunman*, an article by Abdelrahman Abutaleb (BBC Arabic) and Emily Atkinson, 15 December 2025 (BBC).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ahmed Al Ahmed recounts how he disarmed one of the gunmen in Bondi Beach terrorist attack*, an article by Isabella Ross and Shannon Corvo (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-29/bondi-hero-ahmed-al-ahmed-recounts-story-of-wrestling-gunman/106183900#>).

^{iv} Caryll Houselander, *A Rocking-Horse Catholic* (Sheed and Ward, 1955) in *Christ in Every Thing*, Center for Action and Contemplation, Monday, December 22, 2025.