

Festal Eucharist, Christmas Day 2025
Isaiah 9:2-7, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-14
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Generations of children from 1950 to the present day are likely to have read – or perhaps watched, the wonderful stories of C S Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia. Children of every age may remember that when a little girl called Lucy finds herself passing through the back of a wardrobe into the magical land of Narnia, she discovers a whole country, suffering under a terrible spell placed upon it by the White Witch. The Witch exerts total power, she has spies and loyal henchmen everywhere, and her spell means that it is "*always winter but never Christmas*". The talking creatures who live in Narnia are faced with a terrible choice – to serve the White Witch, or, effectively, to go into hiding, shivering in the endless cold and darkness which she has conjured up. But as Lucy and her brothers and sister enter Narnia, there begin to be rumours, founded on ancient predictions – that Aslan is coming. And who is Aslan? He is a great lion, described as "*The King, the Lord of the whole wood, and the son of the Emperor-beyond-the-Sea*", and he stands for the force of good which will overcome the Witch's evil.

The stories of Narnia are gripping in their own right, even if you don't know that C S Lewis was a devout Christian and theologian, and that his stories are steeped in the images and narratives of our Christian Bible. But if you do know this, they provide a wonderful reflection on the story of Jesus Christ and his interaction with our world.

In the prequel to the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, "*The Magician's Nephew*", we hear the story of the Creation of Narnia, as Aslan, together with the shining stars, sings every living creature into being. But the perfection of the land he creates is spoiled by the appearance of the White Witch and her wickedness, which will hold the land hostage for many centuries. Throughout this time, there are stories and poems which tell of Aslan's return to bring springtime and hope and love back to Narnia.

The prophecies of the Old Testament, especially those which we hear around Christmastime, are likewise filled with imagery of light breaking into darkness, as we heard in our first reading this morning: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...*

The coming of Jesus Christ, God's promised Messiah, was (like Aslan) expected to bring light and hope and the restoring of a kingdom of peace and justice into a broken world. People waited in expectation for the arrival of a great king. But when he came, he came not as a grand king, in riches and glory and power, but as the tiny baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, who would nonetheless bring in God's kingdom.

To return to the story of Narnia's endless winter, the first signs of light are seen when the children and their animal hosts hear the sound of joyful sleighbells and find that Father Christmas – a more solemn, but deeply gladdening Fr Christmas - has arrived to herald the coming of hope. Father Christmas brings the glad news that the Witch's power is weakening

and the thaw is coming, in much the same way that John the Baptist spoke to people about the imminent arrival of Jesus. John is referring to the Christmas we celebrate today – the beginning of the story of a wonderful happening which will change the world.

For us, Christmas is the start of the saving power of God's love in Christ. It is not the end, nor even, perhaps, the most important part of the story, and the children and animals who are so delighted by Father Christmas' coming in Narnia, will still experience setbacks and even suffering before their joy can be complete. But without Christmas, the darkness of our world has the potential to be unremitting, as everlasting winter could appear to woodland creatures – or indeed to many of us.

As we celebrate the arrival of the baby Jesus at Christmas, we are experiencing the first step on a story which will lead to Easter, and to Christ's victory over Death. Aslan, as you may recall, is killed by the White Witch in place of Edmund, one of the children, who has become a traitor. But, having died, he rises again in the stillness of the dawn, ending the Witch's magic hold over Narnia and winning a great battle over her forces of evil. The children are made Kings and Queens of Narnia, and one might think that they will all live happily ever after.

Yet in Narnia, as here on earth, people (and animals) are able to make their own choices, whether right or wrong, and some choose paths of greed and selfish power, so when we return to Narnia in the next book, we find that a different tyrant has taken over the land, and Peter and Susan and Edmund and Lucy have another battle to fight. And so it continues, as in our world we see glimpses of God's glory and his victory and his love, but we still sometimes experience sadness and pain and fear.

However, in the final book, Aslan opens a door (quite literally) to those who choose to spend their lives, not in Narnia, or in our world, but with him in his own country. Today we celebrate the start of the Christian story: Jesus being born in the stable in fulfilment of the ancient prophecies which spoke of light in the darkness. At Easter, here in church, we shall hear how the adult Jesus' loving self-sacrifice brought about a great victory over death, as C S Lewis describes in the rising of Aslan from the dead.

There will, of course, still be evil and suffering in this world, and sometimes it will seem very dark, but because of the story we remember and thank God for today, which casts light through the darkness, we can also see many glimpses of joy and beauty, love and hope, and one day we too have the choice to pass through an unknown door into that glorious country to live with God forever. Amen