

Christmas Eve
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

December 24, 2015
Rev. Paul Moore

Light in the Darkness

Carmen huddles in a dark culvert. She has fled her home for the last time. Every other time he has hit her she has threatened to leave, but never quite had the courage to actually do it. This time, however, it feels like her nose is broken. She is bleeding from her head, and she fears she may have a broken rib.

She knows he will come after her, and if he finds her at first he will shower her with words of love and a promise to change. Before she always believed them, but not this time. She knows his pattern all too well. Within hours he will get to drinking with his buddies, and after they have left, stinking of cheap whiskey and cigarette smoke, he will want to hold her, and she will find him repulsive. When she refuses he will hit her. He will accuse her of infidelity and all kinds of other ugliness. The only way for it to end is for him to fall asleep in a drunken stupor, or for her to hide. This time, she promises herself, is the last time she will hide from him.

But in the darkness she wonders, where will she go? The police will only take her back to him. The Church will tell her to be a good wife and go home. His parents will shame her and take her back. Her mother is no longer living. Her father beat her one time to the point of unconsciousness, a sleep from which she did not awaken. Her darkness is greater, knowing that she has walked her mother's path, in spite of her vows not to. Rather than let him kill her, this time she has escaped. But where is she to go?

Then she remembers that if she can just get to the city there is a shelter for women like her. She will have to sneak back into the house in the middle of the night to scoop up her children, but they are worth it. Then they will beg, borrow, hide and hike to see if they can get to the city, to the shelter where good people will take care of her.

Several hours later, as she huddles with her children on the side of the road in the pre-dawn darkness, she realizes that she is at a point of no return. If the ride that stops for her recognizes her and sides with her husband all is lost. If the driver recognizes her plight there might, there just might be a ray of hope.

In one sense the story of Carmen is not true. I did not take this from a source other than my own imagination. But in another sense it is very true, for it plays itself out time and again, in cities and towns like Silver City, all over the world, every day. Sometimes it is women, sometimes it is men, the worst scenario is when it is children fleeing from what

should be a safe place—their homes. In every case people find themselves in darkness and they yearn for light.

Why do we yearn for light? Why are we not content with the darkness? Some are, to be sure—though the word “content” is hardly the right one to use. They languish in the pits of depression, for they have given up hope. They have even given up the hope of hope. But we recognize depression as an illness, and those who suffer from it need help. There is something profoundly human about yearning for the light. There is something essentially healthy about having hope. Might it be that buried in our DNA there is a distant memory of light, a hazy picture of Eden haunting our darkness with shadows of glory? I think so.

The glory of the Incarnation is that it is God's promise of light. Images of light and darkness dance through this well-known story of angels and shepherds and a baby in a manger. The darkness of the night around the shepherds contrasts with the glory of the angels. The poverty and misery of the shepherds contrasts with the exalted message entrusted to them. The ignominy of the stable contrasts with the wonder of the Child born there. The humble peasant-girl has given birth to God. The darkness reminds us of the brokenness of our existence. The light recalls Eden from the depths of our DNA, and promises hope.

Carmen and Mary are alike. Both are broken human beings longing for light. Carmen needs it to find a life worth living. Mary needs it to rise to the challenge of this child. The promise of Mary is the promise that into our brokenness God comes with light. Humanity, just exactly as we are, plays host to divinity.

You and I are Carmen. In ways large and small, we yearn for light, for hope in the midst of what feels hopeless. It may be the loss, recent or imminent, of a loved one. It may be the results of unwise behavior on our part or others close or far from us. It may be the result of the station into which we were born in life, in the corner of the world in which we live. We are broken, too. We, too, in ways large and small, are Carmen. We are desperate for hope.

You and I are Mary. Playing host to God means that it is in our power to make God known. It is in our power to live out the hope we have come to know, and to work to grant it to others. We are Mary in many ways. We are Mary when we help disadvantaged children from Sixth Street School deal with the complications of working parents and Christmas Vacation. We are Mary when people who have caught a curve-ball in life come by for assistance and we help them past a rough spot in their financial story. We are Mary when we take Christmas presents to children in Palomas who have

no mother or father to care for them. We are Mary when we take medicines and community development plans to Honduras to make life there tenable, honorable and viable. We are Mary when each of us reaches out to a neighbor, a friend, a loved one or a stranger and offers them a helping hand, a word of comfort, a quiet presence and a gift of life.

This night we celebrate hope in the darkness. We are a people of hope, for we have come to know light in the midst of darkness. We shine the light of God's hope into the darkness of our world.

Merry Christmas!