

Advent is not just about “Jingle Bells”  
(What ever the world of commerce may think)

What better time of the year than December to remind us of how dark things can get. Late sunrise, early sunset – shadows pressing upon us from both sides: a chill in the air. As human beings endowed with imaginations we can see in this natural process a message – that as nature goes dark so can the human mind, harboring negative thoughts, seeing shadows even in the brightest of times – casting shadows *ourselves* as we criticize even people we don’t know, divide the human race into menacing strangers versus righteous good guys.

For instance, in Captain Ahab’s mind – as described in Herman Melville’s classic American story *Moby Dick* – it was a white whale that menaced him – white being the color of death. Moby Dick was only a whale, a big one but as innocent as any fish, large or small, in the sea. But in Ahab’s once attempted effort to capture and kill the whale for profit it injured him, left him with a peg leg. Did the whale intend that? Whales intend only to eat krill and beget other whales – innocent beings doing their thing.

But of course Herman Melville was not simply writing about whales. For him the great white whale in Ahab’s mind was a symbol of evil – I repeat: in Ahab’s mind! And as such, instead of simply engaging in commercial fishing, Ahab made of his voyage a determination to kill that whale, get even with it. He went mad with vengeance. The result? He drove his crew and ship into a contest with Moby Dick that swallowed up both Ahab and crew and cargo down into a whirlpool of violence from which but one shipmate – the innocent sailor Ishmael (which means “man of God”) – bobbed to the surface to be picked up by the good ship Rachel looking for survivors. And so we have a metaphor that fits real disasters like two World Wars, Hiroshima . . . and others that swallow up lives.

Today’s Gospel reading tells of Noah and the ark, of a time when, as the Book of Genesis puts it: *the wickedness of human beings was on earth, and every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil.* In other words, things had gotten out of hand, chaotic, careless – turbulent to the point where a deluge was about to occur – a flood that would drown us all. The Old Testament attributes the flood to God but as with so many disasters it was mindless human beings, like Captain Ahab and other crazies, who cause a deluge.

Except that there was a Noah who would construct an Ark, a Church, a community inclusive of not only humanity but all living things that could ride out such a collapse of civilization.

So how does our church take advantage of this season of increasing darkness – at a time of increasing social and political turbulence throughout our modern world? By reminding us that natural darkness is simply a benign, even necessary kind of darkness and that it can remind us that on a certain day – if we have faith - the sun will begin to

rise earlier, to signal the illumination of our minds, our world - in the revelation of a  
infant about to wake up in a manger. In a manger that is your heart and mine.