

***The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light.*** The prophecy we heard was fulfilled in the Gospel: as shepherds kept watch over their flocks by night, ***the glory of the Lord shone around them.*** In the midst of our earthly night, a light appeared from heaven. What is the meaning of this light that shone in the darkness? Saint Paul tells us: ***God's grace has been revealed and it has made salvation possible for the human race.***

But what is this grace? it is divine love, the love that changes lives, renews history, liberates from evil, fills hearts with peace and joy. Tonight, the love of God has been revealed to us: it is Jesus. In Jesus, the Most High made himself tiny, so that we might love him. But we can still ask ourselves: why does Saint Paul describe the coming of God into our world as grace? To tell us that it is utterly free. Whereas on earth everything seems to be about giving in order to get, God comes down freely. His love is non-negotiable: we did nothing to deserve it and we will never be able to repay it.

***God's grace has been revealed.*** Tonight, we realize that, when we failed to measure up, God became small for our sake; while we were going about our own business, he came into our midst. Christmas reminds us that God continues to love us all, even the worst of us.

To me, to you to each of us, he says today: 'I love you and I will always love you, for you are precious in my eyes'. God does not love you because you think and act the right way. He loves you, plain and simple. His love is unconditional; it does not depend on you. You may have mistaken ideas, you may have made a complete mess of things, but the Lord continues to love you. How often do we think that God is good if we are good, yet that is not how he is? For all our sins, he continues to love us. His love does not change. It is not fickle; it is faithful. It is patient. This is the gift we find at Christmas. We discover to our amazement that the Lord is absolute gratuity, absolute tender love. His glory does not overwhelm us; his presence does not terrify us. He is born in utter poverty in order to win our hearts by the wealth of his love.

*Pope Francis*