

The Light of Christmas

Isaiah 9:2-7 (NIV)

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

(Ushers: Close sanctuary doors at the start of the sermon. Station ushers at the three areas of light switches – back, left, right. The organist will cover her lights.)

Having a Christmas Eve candlelight worship here at church is a special tradition for us. In fact, Christmas Eve celebration in general is a special tradition for me. As a kid, my family had a set Christmas Eve routine. Being the youngest of three, I didn't know any better than the family went to the children's Christmas Eve program at church, which all three of us siblings participated in. Then we went as a family to visit Farm Grandma and Grandpa, the moniker tells you where they lived. After that, we would take the long way home to marvel at the Christmas lights set up all around town. Finally, we would come home and open presents. Yes, we did presents on Christmas Eve.

Although my family right now doesn't have those same traditions because our families live in Wisconsin and we live in Utah and because my wife and I are still very cognizant of getting the kids home and in bed at a decent time since we are all coming to church again tomorrow morning for Christmas Day worship. But we do take time around Christmas to marvel at the lights. My wife and the boys drove around checking out the lights in our area. We went as a family to Layton Commons Park and did the hayride for the "Lights Before Christmas" display. As the kids get older, I'm sure that our traditions will change, but we will still more than likely spend time marveling at the beautiful lights at Christmas time. I encourage you to do the same after you leave here tonight. Take a little extra time getting to your destination and soak in the beauty of those Christmas lights.

But what if when you went home tonight or wherever you are going and there were no Christmas lights? *(Pastor or acolyte turns off the lights on the Christmas tree. Ushers begin lowering the lights in the sanctuary. In the back, turn off lights "2" & "1." On the right and left, dim the lights half way. Organist dims her lights half way.)* Every decoration was dark. No nativity scene with a bright shining star above them. No Rudolphs or Santas or Frostys lit up to see. *(Turn off light "3" in the back. Turn off lights on the left and right except the cross on the right. Organist turns her lights completely off.)* What if all the houses were dark? No garage lights illuminating the path to home. No door lights beckoning your return. All the Christmas trees so prominently displayed in the front sitting rooms are dark, bulbs unlit, maybe burned out. No light from any house. *(Acolyte begins putting out all the lights on the altar, leaving the Advent wreath as the last lights to put out. Usher on the right turns off the cross light as the final candles are put out.)* What if all the street lights were turned off, the headlights on your car did not work, the interior lights won't go on, and your cell phone was out of juice? What if there were no stars in the sky, no moon shining bright?

Take away all our lights, and it would be pitch black like this. Could you get home with no light? I suppose we could try to grope our way around. I'm confident we could probably feel our way out of this building, but then how many miles until you get home? There would be so many obstacles. You would trip. You would stumble. You would fall. You would get hurt. You would probably get lost, maybe never make it back home. You would be a "people walking in darkness." You would be "those living in the land of deep darkness." (verse 2)

This kind of darkness is uncomfortable. It feels cold. This darkness is smothering, suffocating; it drains our life away. I mean, plants die without light. In the fall and winter when clouds often cover our skies, people get depressed without an adequate amount of light – S.A.D., seasonal affective disorder. Darkness is cold. It causes you to shiver, and more than just because of the temperature. We shiver because we are afraid. We are afraid of the dark – adults and kids alike – and for good reason. We can't see what's happening in the dark. We don't know what is waiting for us. We avoid dark alleys because bad things happen there. Evil breeds in darkness thinking it can get away with whatever it does because there is no light.

The Bible describes people living in sin as people living in this kind of darkness. That means that if you have ever done anything wrong, if you are anything less than perfect at all times during your life, this darkness is your existence, spiritually speaking. We are born into sin. And so we are born into this darkness. It's a scary place, devoid of hope, devoid of comfort, devoid of anything happy. There is no guidance. And evil breeds in this darkness. The warmth of life is leaving us the longer we dwell in darkness. The depressing thoughts sink in. Will the icy fingers of death come and embrace us? This is the darkness that covers all people because all of us are sinners. All of us have failed to live a life of perfection, a life worthy of acceptance before the almighty and all perfect God.

Darkness, though, is the absence of light. Once there is light, darkness must flee. Darkness cannot overcome or overpower the light. *(Using a match, the pastor will light the Christ candle of the Advent wreath.)* Even the smallest amount of light is enough to make darkness flee. With just this one candle lit, you now have something to focus on. Your eyes are adjusting. You can start to see your surroundings. You have something to move towards. *(Have acolyte come up and relight all the candles at the altar. Pastor takes the light on his candle and gives it to the ushers to begin lighting the candles for the congregation. One usher needs to remain at the light switch for the cross.)* Take this light with you, and you will see your path no matter how dark it is. Now you see the picture that Isaiah is painting. "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." (verse 2)

Who is this light? *(Usher on the right turns on the cross light.)* Isaiah tells us, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever." (verses 6-7) The Light that dawns on the people of the world is the Son whose birth we celebrate tonight. The Light is the Immanuel about whom Isaiah prophesied just two chapters earlier. This Light is Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, born of a virgin named Mary over 2000 years ago in a little town called Bethlehem. He is my Lord and Savior. He is my Light, the Light that scatters the darkness of sin.

We have come here to see this Light and be around his Light. He's not just a light that warms us and makes us feel good so that we think happy thoughts on Christmas Eve. No, this child, he is Light that is powerful. He is the Light that acts and gets things done. His Light breaks through the darkness, scatters it. All of us at one time knew nothing but darkness, spiritually speaking. In that spiritual darkness, we were held by the yoke of sin, the slavery of sin. We knew nothing but evil. We knew nothing but the evil of darkness. But the Light came. Jesus Christ came. He shattered the enemy of darkness, the enemy that is sin. He broke the power that it held over us. He released us from that captivity to sin because he is not just a child; he is Mighty God. He forgave our sins and so released us from their dark control over us. This Child brought us up out of darkness and into his wonderful Light.

This Child born to us, this Jesus, though all we saw with our eyes was a babe in a manger on that very first Christmas, he was at the same time a powerful leader. God told us that the government is on his shoulders. He is the promised descendant of King David. "Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end." (verse 7) He's in charge. He is in control. His coming, his Light dawning on us, means that he reigns over us no matter how much darkness we see.

The Light of this child, of Jesus, will never go out. It will never be extinguished. Jesus himself said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) When we come and gather around his Word, we have his Light. His Word shines into our lives and shows us that this Christ Child is our Savior from sin. We are imperfect. We are not worthy before Mighty God. But Jesus is worthy before God. He lived for us. He was perfect in our place. His Light shows us that he accomplished our perfection for us. His Light shows us that by what he has done for us, we are saved. Because the Christ Child has come, because he is the Light, we have the light of life.

There are still many people living in that land of deep darkness. You probably know a few of them. Will you share the Light of the world with them after tonight? Will you yourself keep coming to the Light so that you continue to have the light of life that only Jesus gives, that only Jesus is? Will you share Jesus as the Light of the world to people just as the shepherds did on that very first Christmas Eve? Will you show people that this child lying in the manger wrapped in clothes is our Savior, the Light of our lives?

Tonight we celebrate again the nativity of our Lord. Tonight we celebrate again that God has not left us to be captive to the darkness. No, his Light has dawned. God has given us his Light; he has given us his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. You have that Light as you carry his message into the world. Shine that Light into the world when you leave tonight. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." (verse 6) Amen.