

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace. Amen.

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Isaiah 9:2-7 | Nativity of Our Lord – Christmas Eve | December 24, 2018

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Jesus Juva

In the name of Jesus, the Light of the World, dear friends:

Psychologists call it *scotophobia*. In its most severe form, it's called *nictophobia*. You and I know it as fear of the dark. Some adults suffer from this fear, but it's common among children. In fact, it's a phase that most children go through during their younger years.

Interestingly, the fear is not usually of the darkness itself, but of what might be out there hidden in the darkness. Children often imagine a boogeyman in the closet, or a monster hiding under the bed.

Parents use a number of methods to help their kids with this fear: plugging in a nightlight, leaving the bedroom door open a crack and the hall light on, letting their children have a small flashlight or glow stick, doing a pre-bedtime check in the closet and under the bed to make sure there are no hidden dangers. And sometimes parents attempt to reason with their kids: "There's nothing there in the dark that isn't there in the light."

Ever since Adam and Eve fell, this world has been a very dark place. I wish I could stand and tell you that there's nothing to be afraid of, that there's nothing in the

darkness that isn't in the light. But there is. There is danger and disaster. There is death in the darkness. You see, this world is filled with the darkness of sin.

The portion of God's Word before us this Christmas Eve shows us the Light, a Light that shines in the darkness. Lying in Bethlehem's manger is the cure for sin and death, a light that chases away the darkness and all its threatening dangers. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. Let's spend a few moments right now talking about darkness and light.

I. Darkness

The prophet Isaiah served the people of Judah about seven centuries before our Savior's birth. Judah was a mess. People didn't care for each other. Instead it was "**neighbor against neighbor**" (3:5). Substance abuse was rampant. People are described as "**heroes at drinking wine**" (5:22). Sexual immorality was everywhere. No one knew how to blush anymore. There were many poor people, but no one has any mercy or compassion on them. There was little respect for the elderly who were openly mocked. Most had long ago walked away from the light of the true faith. Judah was a dark place.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Our world is a dark place too. Our world is filled with violence and terrorism, racism and human trafficking. The family unit is collapsing to make way for “anything goes” sexuality. Moderate drinking is a rare exception, especially among us Wisconsinites who are “champions at drinking brandy old fashioned.” And, sadly, it’s still neighbor against neighbor, republican against democrat, conservative against liberal. Isaiah describes our world with words like *darkness* and *deep darkness* (which can also be translated “shadow of death”). This world is truly a dark place, smothered in the darkness of sin and unbelief.

We hear this and, at times, we shrug our shoulders thinking: *This world isn’t such a bad place*. Really? Let me ask you this: “Are you not dying?” If you think the answer is no, let me give you a reality check. You are dying. We all are. Sin brings death. The inevitability of death casts a gloom over everything. When you’re sitting at Christmas dinner tomorrow realize this: everyone sitting at that table, all those folks that you love so dearly, will be planted in the ground one day.

Sounds awful, right? It is awful. But we need to hear it because too often we don’t take the darkness seriously. In fact, sometimes we embrace it. St. John wrote that “**people loved darkness instead of light**” (John 3:19). We see that in our lives, don’t we? Be honest. When faced with a decision, aren’t you first drawn to the self-serving choice, the one that benefits you the most? And when someone wrongs

you, is your first thought one of forgiveness and reconciliation, or do you fantasize about getting even? You see, our hearts are by nature just as dark as the rest of the world around us.

What can we do about this darkness? What light can we shine on the situation? We like to think that we can make things better, don’t we? If we just work hard enough we can rid our world of violence and oppression, poverty and racism. If we’re really sincere, maybe we can even drive the darkness from our own hearts. Let me ask you this: can you stop yourself from being selfish, from sinning, from aging, from dying. If we can’t even fix ourselves, what kind of arrogance and delusion would make us think we could ever fix the world? No, my friends, we can do nothing about the darkness of sin and death. Left on our own we would die in the darkness eternally.

II. Light

We can’t fix the darkness. But God can. And God did. God switched on the Light. This Light is person. “**To us a child is born, to us a son is given.**” Jesus Christ is that child. He is the Son God. He is a man, for he was born of a human mother. But he’s more than a man. He’s God. We can see this from the titles that Isaiah gives him:

- **Wonderful Counselor** – No merely human counselor gives perfect advice. They don’t know everything. But Jesus does. So his counsel is wonderful, perfect.

- **Mighty God** – Could be it be more obvious? Jesus is God Almighty. He can do anything.
- **Everlasting Father** – Jesus is the Creator and author of life and has the compassion of a father for his children.
- **Prince of Peace** – This is what the angels sang about on that first Christmas night. Jesus came to bring peace, peace between a sinless God and sinful human beings.

The Light in the darkness is God in human flesh, God come to earth to save sinners, to rescue us from the darkness.

Why is that important? Why did the Savior have to be both God and man to rescue us? Think about it. If God just wanted to tell us how to think about sin and darkness, he could have sent a mere man. This he did many times when he sent the prophets to tell us about his holy will. But we didn't follow his laws. We broke them at every point.

If God wanted to give us an example of how to keep his law and live a sinless life, he could have sent an angel. He often sent angels. He could have pointed to Gabriel and said, "Be like him. He always does what I tell him to do perfectly." But we have no ability to obey like one of God's angels.

We needed more. We needed one who could get rid of the darkness. We needed one who could both live under the law in our place (man), and keep it perfectly (God). We needed one who could die on the cross in our place (man), but whose

sacrifice would be of infinite value to count for all people (God). We needed the God-man. We needed God with blood in his veins, precious blood that could be shed for the sins of the world. And what we needed we received. God sent his one and only Son. The baby lying on the ox's breakfast is true God wrapped in human flesh, our perfect Savior who lived, died and rose for us.

Jesus, the Light of the world has destroyed sin and death forever. Yes, we still sin, but God no longer counts our sins against us (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus paid for them with his blood, and so we are free from sin's guilt and sin's punishment forever.

Yes, we still die. Unless Jesus returns first, one day we will be lowered into the ground. And the people sitting around the dinner table with us tomorrow are going to die too. But Jesus rose from the dead and defeated death forever. All those who trust in him as their Savior never really die. No, they have eternal life, the certainty of salvation, the sure hope of heaven.

What a gift God has given us in Jesus, the Light of the world! It's a humbling gift, isn't it? Imagine that for Christmas your significant other gave the gift of a one-year gym membership. You look at the envelope. You look at your paunch. You make the connection. Your loved one is telling you something with that gift – something that you may not want to acknowledge. It's no different with the greatest Christmas gift, the light of Christ. In giving this gift God says to each of us:

“You are so broken and dirty, so utterly incapable of fixing yourself or cleaning yourself up, so lost in the darkness, that I have to come and save you. The situation is so dire that it will require a good man, the perfect man, the God-man, to die for you.”

It’s humbling to think that God had to give such a gift for you and me. But the fact that he went ahead and gave it at great cost to himself fills our hearts with peace and an inexpressible joy. To think: God loves you and me so much that he sent his one and only Son, down into our darkness, to fill our lives with the light of salvation.

This world is a dark place. But Jesus is the Light of the World. His light blazes in the darkness. Focus on his light. Cling to him. He is with you always helping, forgiving, saving. Trust in him. And you will never walk in darkness again. Amen.

S.D.G.