

“JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

Isaiah 9:2-7, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:8-20

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2019

Have you ever been in a place where there was absolutely no light in it? Many of our youth have come to find out what darkness is like when they have been involved in one of our night games. When it is pitch black, it's impossible to see anything and it is very possible to find yourself running into things you can't see, or falling into holes you don't know about, or being completely surprised by someone lurking in the darkness. When we are in total darkness, fear creeps into us, and all kinds of worries and anxiety comes into our minds and we often become paralyzed, unable to move or think or even speak. Darkness takes a while to get used to and we usually don't like being in it.

Today it is hard for us to understand total darkness because we have all of these electronic devices that provide light to us – flashlights, phone lights, car lights, street lights, emergency lights, many devices that emit light that help us to eliminate the darkness around us so that we can see and be safe and stay confident. And because we are so accustomed to having light in our life, we are thrown into panic when the electricity goes off, or a storm wipes out all the power stations, or we become stranded somehow without the ability to have light in our life. Physical light is important to all of our lives. Light gives us hope and casts out fear.

But there are times in our lives when we become surrounded by darkness without even knowing it. Yes, when the physical lights go out, we can see it quickly if we have our vision. But what happens when our spiritual light goes out, when all our hopes and dreams and expectations leave us in spiritual darkness? When everything we are used to and comfortable with and have come to expect in our lives suddenly falls apart, we are left in spiritual darkness that can be so difficult to overcome. The darkness of poverty; the bleakness of an incurable disease; the blackness of a failing or failed relationship; the stark emptiness of financial setbacks or losses; the loneliness of the death of a loved one; the frustration of the loss of a job; the devastation of a house fire; the cruelty of human trafficking; the hopelessness of drug addiction; the despair of Alzheimer's. These are just a few of the things in our lives that cast us

into the utter darkness of life, and our spirits are left without hope, or peace, or joy, or even love. Spiritual darkness is so much worse than physical darkness and yet so many of us live within this darkness every day.

Fortunately we are not left without hope. Our Old Testament lesson of Isaiah 9 sends us a glimmer of life again. *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them. You have given them great joy, Lord; You have made them happy. They rejoice in what You have done...”* (Is. 9:2-3). God knows the darkness that we face. He knows the bleakness that we experience in our lives. And He loves us enough NOT to leave us in that place, but offers to us the remedy that brings light back to us.

Isaiah gives us that promise of hope, *“A child is born to us! A son is given to us! And He will be our ruler. He will be called, ‘Wonderful Counselor,’ ‘Mighty God,’ ‘Everlasting Father,’ ‘Prince of Peace.’ His royal power will continue to grow; His kingdom will always be at peace...”* (9:6-7). The Lord provided hope in the promise that a light would come that would dispel all the darkness around us so that our lives would be transformed.

The New Testament lesson of Titus 2 demonstrates this hope. Verse 14 says, Jesus Christ *“gave Himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to Him alone and are eager to do good.”* Jesus provides us the hope we need to find our way out of the darkness of the world and into the light of God’s love.

And that promise of hope was fulfilled way before of Jesus’ birth. It was given to Mary when the angel Gabriel told her *“you will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make Him a king, as his ancestor David was, and He will be the King of the descendants of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end!”* (Luke 1:31-33). Surprised that God would do something this wonderful through her, a humble, simple, lowly young woman of Nazareth, Mary conceded to allow God do this great thing through her because it meant that God had not given up on His people. He was providing

hope in the giving of His Son to lead us.

That promise was also given to Joseph when Gabriel told him, "*For it is by the Holy Spirit that (Mary) has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus – because He will save His people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:20-21). Concerned about what would happen if he took Mary home to be his wife, Joseph was given hope that God was bringing light to the world, so that we could have a relationship with Him again. The sins of the world would no longer prevent us from the face-to-face relationship with God because Jesus would save "His people" from their sins.

And tonight we heard that hope was brought into the world at the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night. In the midst of the darkness of their world, in the darkness of the night, "*an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them...*" (Luke 2:9). To the most humble of all people, to shepherds, God reveals His light to the world. To absolute "nobodies" God brings the news about the Savior's birth. They had no power in their society, no influence, no political sway. They had no authority, no wealth, no proper health care, no formal education, yet it was to those shepherds that God announced to them that there was now hope for life. Light was coming into the world that could change their lives and provide them assurance of God's love for them.

As any one of us would respond if bright lights were suddenly shown upon us as we are in a very dark place, these shepherds are terrified! Taken completely by surprise, these simple folks don't know what to do. Do they run away? Do they try to hide? Do they take up their staffs and crooks and attack? But the angel visit is not meant to scare them, but only to inform them of the magnitude of God's great love given to the world on that very night in the town of Bethlehem. "*Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born – Christ the Lord!*" (Luke 2:10-11).

A Savior? Born in Bethlehem? Tonight? For us? But how will we know it's Him? "*...You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger*" (2:12). Wait a minute – a Savior, wrapped in

cloths, lying in a manger? That doesn't sound much like how a Savior should be born. Shouldn't he be wrapped in the finest cloth, cared for by many attendants, laid in a fine crafted crib in a palace?

Mangers are feeding troughs! That's not suitable for a Savior! That means he's living in poverty, that he has no power, that he has no clout or authority. If he's in a manger, that means he's in a stable, with animals as his attendants, and pigeons for messengers. Hey, that means he's just like us!

Oh, the shepherds are overthinking the whole thing. So to get their attention and help them to focus on what the first angel was saying, "*Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those whom He is pleased!'*" (2:13-14). And as quickly as they appeared, they are gone, with the words echoing off of the surrounding hills, "peace on earth, peace on earth, peace on earth..." The light that once blinded them for the moment is suddenly gone again, leaving the shepherds glory-blind.

But what is this great thing that the angels have said to them? There is now hope because a Savior is born? He's just a baby, but HE'S HERE, for us, just like us, to bring peace on the earth! So off they run to Bethlehem, so that they aren't the last ones to get there. They don't know that they are the messengers of God's great work. They don't realize that they were the chosen ones to proclaim the message of hope to their people. But so curious are they that they search for and find Jesus right where the angel told them they would find Him. (**Verse 1 of Away in a Manger**).

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay, the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

What a precious little baby boy. He doesn't seem to be bothered at all by sleeping in a manger. And the shepherds begin to notice that Mary and Joseph are not the only ones there in the stable. (**Verse 2 of Away in a Manger**).

The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes,
I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky, and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Suddenly it hits them, what the angel had told them – The Savior of the World is Right Here!

WOW! “*He will bring peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased.*” (2:14). And suddenly they begin to see Jesus completely differently. (**Verse 3 of Away in a Manger**).

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray;
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

Jesus, the Savior of the world, changes everything for all those who will seek Him and follow Him. Not just with lip service, not just in name-sake, but wholeheartedly follow Him, obeying His teachings and doing what He commands.

Now, as a baby, Jesus could do nothing to save the world from the darkness that holds it captive. If we only see Jesus as meek and mild, still in the manger, we have little hope for finding His real power in us.

But Jesus grew up, became a man, a teacher of the Word of God, mighty in power and caring to the people. His teaching opened the door for us to understand who God the Father is. His miracles demonstrated the compassion He has for those of us who are spiritually lost in the darkness. His crucifixion claimed all the sins of the world. His death on the cross paid the penalty of every sin committed. His blood, poured out onto the world, brought forgiveness to all those who would believe in Him and receive Him as their Savior and Lord. His resurrection brought to us the promise of new life in Him, that death is not the final victor when we trust in Him. This is the light that Jesus brought to us at His birth on Christmas. But we have to move beyond the stable, beyond the resurrection, to personal faith in Him as the One who saves His people from their sins.

Only Jesus is the Light of the world for us today. Without Him, we are lost, imprisoned in the darkness that envelops the world in which we live. But with Him, we are released from our bondage to sin and death and have new life through Him. In Him we have no more reason to fear, no more reason to be paralyzed by the “what-ifs” of the world. In Jesus, the Light of our world, we have reason to rejoice, a reason to celebrate, a reason to really live, a reason to tell everyone about what happened on that first Christmas night so long ago, “*your Savior was born*” (2:11). (**Begin lighting the peoples’**

candles in the pews.)

So let the light of Jesus Christ light up your life, live in you and flow through you to the rest of the world, beginning with the one right next to you. Don't hide Jesus' light. Don't be afraid to show Jesus' light. For there is nothing that can quench His light living in you and shining out from you.

Be the ones who chase away the darkness of this world by living with the light of Jesus Christ in you. Keep following Him in all you do, in all you say, so that the whole world might know Him as the Savior, who has come to save His people from their sins.