

Isaiah 9:2-7 (The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Eve)

“Light Comes into the Darkness”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

December 24, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is Isaiah 9:2-7:

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. ⁴For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Darkness. The absence of light. I don't know that we really understand "darkness" in our modern world. The blessing of the light bulb means that we are no longer confined to the daylight hours for work and play. There was a time not all that long ago that, when the sun set in the evening, your day was over. There were no streetlights. There were no outdoor floodlights. Maybe you had a candle or an oil lamp or two in your home, but that really wasn't much. There was just a real darkness. In order to experience real darkness, we have to travel away from this East Coast megalopolis. We have to go far away from the effects of all the lights in order to experience real darkness. And if you've ever had the opportunity, what a wondrous view of God's night sky that gives. I've been told that you can see so many more stars that you can from your backyard.

Why bring up darkness on Christmas Eve? Darkness seems a bit gloomy for Christmas. However, it was God through Isaiah the prophet who brought up darkness, "The people who

walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone." Now, we don't have a perfect idea of true darkness because of all the ambient light around us. But we can experience it in the right places. But what about "deep darkness"? That's a whole other concept!

Come with me back to the beginning, to Genesis 1:1-2, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and **darkness** was over the face of the deep." (Gen. 1:1-2 ESV). This is the darkness of, well, nothing. There is only God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the eternal Three in One. There could be only darkness in what was to be the created world because light didn't yet exist until the Triune God commanded by His Word, "Let there be light." This "darkness" is the same word Isaiah uses in our text when He speaks of the people who "walked in darkness." But God's prophet parallels this with the people who lived in "a land of **deep darkness**." This is even darker than the darkness of nothing. This darkness is even more dark than darkness! It's "deep darkness." Now if we struggle with regular darkness, what in the world do we do with the concept of "deep darkness"? The best I can do is to describe it with other words. "Deep darkness" is gloom, an impenetrable gloom, a pitch blackness, perhaps even "death-shadow" as the word is most often translated in Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psa. 23:4 ESV).

Well, this is indeed getting very gloomy for Christmas Eve! Darkness is bad enough, but deep darkness and impenetrable gloom is far worse. Darkness without and darkness within. That is how Isaiah described the life of the people of Galilee in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. These were people who were living their lives in the gloom and utter darkness

of ignorance, distress, misery, and sin. And this was not only their situation but that of all people. The inward condition of all people is the plight of sin and misery in which we carry on with our lives. This ends with each person passing through the deep gloom of death!

How appropriate then is the metaphor of darkness. There isn't just evil "out there," that we experience in sickness and poverty and abuse and struggle, but there is evil right here, in each of our own hearts, a deep gloom of sin and guilt, of distress, and the misery caused by our sins and the sins of others against us. We have real darkness in our time. We are born walking in it. And we use it to conceal ourselves and our own walks of shame. We get lost in the dark, not knowing what to do or where to go. It certainly doesn't help when you hear the boots of Satan and his evil angels walking right behind you. They come like locusts, trying to rob you of God's Word. They pin you up in your sin. They leave you to sit in darkness of your own guilt and shame.

But this darkness is broken as the people see a great Light. The deep darkness is shattered as Light shines. In place of darkness and calamity, the people saw the Light of peace and blessing. In place of the darkness of ignorance, the people saw the Light of the knowledge of God's Word. In the place of the deep darkness of eternal death, the Light of salvation shown bright.

The deep, gloomy darkness of sin and death could only be removed from people by the Light of life. Only a Light which was able to bring life and immortality to light could dispel this deep darkness (2 Tim. 1:10). And such a Light appeared—Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh. From John 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and

without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1–5 ESV). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12 ESV).

This life is a life that overcomes both temporal and eternal death. This is an eternal life that comes to you as a gift of the Child born to us, a Son given to us. This Child, Jesus, the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, is your Lord. This Child, Jesus, this Son in whom the Father is well-pleased, took on our human nature without sin so that He might be the One to wage a spiritual battle against the cosmic forces of this present darkness (Eph. 6:12). We could not fight this battle, nor could we win against a foe over whom people have no power. But Christ, true God and true Man, could. He broke for us the burdensome yoke of sin. He set us free from our sins and from the punishment of eternal death and hell by taking upon Himself our sins and the guilt of our sins as if they were His own. He suffered the God-forsaken deep darkness of death and hell on the cross in our place. Christ's sacrificial death on the cross set us free from the deep darkness of sin through His own blood poured out for us. And where there is the forgiveness of sins, you can be absolutely sure that there is eternal life and salvation because Jesus Christ is not only the Crucified One, but also the Risen and Living One.

Having offered Himself on the cross as the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world, on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. Sin is defeated. Death is conquered. The deep darkness, the death-shadow, is no more. As Isaiah wrote in chapter 60, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness

shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you" (Is. 60:1–2 ESV). For the Child born is the King of kings. The Infant laid in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes is the All-Powerful God. Jesus the Son, fully human and fully divine, is the only Savior from sin and death. As the Risen Christ said to his servant John in Revelation 1, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and the Grave" (Rev. 1:17–18).

Pastor Stephen Starke's Easter hymn gives the Good News of Christmas and Easter to us so well as we rejoice in the Light of Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Lord Jesus.

Hymn 481:

- 1 Scatter the darkness, break the gloom;
Sun, reveal an empty tomb
 Shining with joy for all our sorrows,
 Hope and peace for all tomorrows,
Life unclipsed by doubt and dread:
Christ has risen from the dead!
- 2 Bearing the standard from on high
As the Lamb of God to die;
 He who for us, so cruelly treated,
 Lives again—our foes defeated!
Where is your sting, O death and grave?
Christ has shown His strength to save!
- 3 Banners of triumph, be unfurled!
Trumpets, sound throughout the world!
 Crying and sighs, give way to singing:
 Life from death, our Lord is bringing!

Let there begin the jubilee—
Christ has gained the victory!¹

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world; the light no darkness can overcome. The Savior's light scatters the darkness of sin and death. By grace through faith in Jesus, forgiveness and eternal life are yours. The Light of Christ through His Gospel Word, Baptism, and Lord's Supper illumines His Church. Here, in Word and Sacrament, He forgives your sins and strengthens your most holy faith.

By faith, you are God's people called out of darkness and into Christ's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Through the Gospel, the light of Christ shines upon you. Do not be afraid of the dark. For the darkness of this world, the deep darkness of sin, death, and the devil shall never overcome the Light who is Jesus Christ.

"From the manger newborn light Shines in glory through the night. Darkness there no more resides; In this light faith now abides."² Amen.

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