

“Your Light Has Come”

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5).

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This proclamation from our Gospel reading evokes the very first words of the Bible, and these words point us directly to God’s act of creation. And do you remember the first words God spoke? Genesis 1 records, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Then God said, “Let there be light” (1:3). First, there was light. In fact, there was no life without light. So, for God to transform this formless void into a vital and wonderful world teeming with life, the first thing God spoke into existence was light. In other words, no light, no life.

And as it is for the world in general, so also it is for you and me. No light, no life. Just as darkness covered the face of the deep in the beginning, so also we are born in darkness; conceived in sin, unable to know or love God, and powerless to obey or serve or even search for him. The Book of Isaiah describes this innate darkness as the prophet writes, “We hope for light and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight... We hope for... salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities” (Isaiah 59:9–12).

And we are no different from those of Isaiah’s day. Alienated from God, unable to please him, and separated from God by our sins, we grope our way through life with no direction and without hope. And the darkness into which we are born is total. It is not twilight and there is no moonlight to show us the way. It’s not simply difficult to make our way to God and to gain his favor, but because of our sinful condition, it is impossible – unless the light shines on us. And that is exactly what we celebrate today.

Isaiah predicted it. He said, “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” (Isaiah 9:2). Isaiah predicted it and John described it. In our Christmas Gospel, John writes, “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 1:4-5). The light of the world has come to us, and Jesus himself said it: “I am the light of the world,” he said. “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

But what does this mean? What happens when this light shines? The answer to that question comes in the climax of our text when John declares, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). We have seen his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father. And now we begin to discover what it means that Jesus is the light of the world. In fact, John tells us plainly: He is full of grace and truth. This is the glory of Jesus.

He is full of truth. No one in the Scriptures was ever told a lie about this child. The shepherds were told the truth as the angel announced Jesus as the Savior and Lord. The Wise Men told

Herod the truth about the child who was the King of the Jews. Simeon spoke the truth about the child in his arms who was the light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. When the Light of the World appears, falsehood is exposed and the truth is revealed.

And throughout the Gospels, Jesus demonstrates the veracity of His word as he repeats the phrase, “Truly!” “Truly, I say to you.” Jesus used that expression eight times in the Gospel of Luke, fourteen times in the Gospel of Mark, and twenty-seven times in the Gospel of Matthew. And in the Gospel of John, Jesus doubles down on this emphatic qualifier as he says, “Truly, truly, I say to you...” Twenty-four times He says this in the Gospel of John. The point is that Jesus wants us to know that he speaks the truth. Jesus wants us to know that He is the truth.

When the light of the world comes, everything is revealed for what it truly is. Wickedness and sin are exposed, and nothing is hidden from him. When the light comes into the world, everything is revealed to him, and this fact alone can be terrifying, but this truth is not alone. Listen again to today’s text, “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The truth that saves us is the message of his grace. You see, the one who lies in the manger is the Savior because he brings grace. As Jesus says later in the Gospel of John, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). The baby whose birth we celebrate today is the one who came to bring forgiveness for sin, to wash away guilt, to cover the shame of our wrongdoing, and to bestow innocence and holiness and life. He came to save us.

This is the message of Christmas. We do not just celebrate the birth of the Son of God. We also celebrate what he came to do. He was not born simply to show his solidarity with humanity. He was born to accomplish something for us. That’s why Satan sent Herod after the Bethlehem baby – not just because of who he was, but to prevent him from accomplishing what he came to do. You see, he came to be our substitute. He came to be what we were supposed to be – and were not – but he was. He came to do what we were supposed to do – and did not – but he did. He came as one of us and kept God’s Law perfectly for us. And He came to suffer what we should have suffered. And He came to die for you and me, and in His suffering and death, He atoned for all that was wrong about us. And today through faith in him, we now stand righteous and innocent in the eyes of the Father.

So today, we celebrate the birth of this child, but not only that. We also celebrate his life, his death, and his resurrection for us. We celebrate both who he is and what he came to do. He is the eternal Word, the eternal Son of God, made flesh for us to cover us with His grace. He is the light of the world who shines a grace that pours out God’s forgiveness on us, a grace that surrounds us with his love, a grace that crowns us with honor and glory for Jesus’ sake, a true and unconditional grace that opens up for us an eternal life of joy, even as we walk in the valley of the shadow of death. Today, your light has come. Today, your life begins anew, and the darkness will never put it out. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today, and all God’s people say, “Amen.”

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