

The Light

Shine on Us

"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 ESV

What a powerful prophecy. The words of Isaiah, penned around 700 years before the coming of Christ, stark and hopeful. *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.* This short verse depicts the contrast of Israel's sin and repeated rejection of God, with the promise of His presence and deliverance. Even with their history of turning away from the Lord and choosing to live in their own strength and frustration, He would one day restore His people through a "great light" who would lift them out of oppression and war, and redeem them from their darkness. But how would this happen? Isaiah goes on to describe some of who the light would be a few verses later: *"For 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."* - Isaiah 9:6

Thinking about this passage, I wonder – had I been there when He came, would I have recognized the Child? Would I have taken in the light of this Prince of Peace?

We know from the Gospels that some did. Among them the shepherds, the wise men, the prophetess Anna. They listened to the angels, followed the star, responded to God's Spirit. Luke tells us that Simeon was filled with the Spirit when he spoke over the infant Jesus in the temple, recalling the promise and recognizing its fulfillment. *"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel,"* -Luke 2:30-32. We also know that throughout Jesus' life, many who were studied in the Scriptures did not recognize Him and rejected Him.

A couple of years ago, I opted to have early lens replacement surgery (in my 40s), to remove congenital cataracts which had progressively been obfuscating the light from my retinas. The years of muddied vision made my post-op eyes highly sensitive to unhindered light, much more so than I anticipated. At first, it was downright painful to encounter the sunshine, any bright interior lighting, or even a computer screen. For a number of weeks, I wore dark glasses and sought the comfort of dimly lit rooms.

Though it wasn't exactly "deep darkness" I had been living in, it was surprising how much time it took to *want* to be in the light while my brain adjusted and my body healed. It was so different to what I was used to. There was something else too. This new light brought into sharp focus things which I had been largely oblivious to before – like the dirt and dust on nearly every surface, cobwebs in the light fixtures, dog fur on the clean laundry, and details everywhere. As much as I was gob smacked with the gorgeous, vibrant colors I was now seeing, the magnificent fine detail in nature, I also was confronted with the ugly and the undesirable. These things were no longer hidden, and they required my action. The selfish part of me actually lamented this new knowledge.

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In our relational and spiritual lives, Jesus illuminates everything as well - the good we want to see and the bad that we'd rather not. What was hidden is exposed. His character and teachings reveal truth and uncover our human nature and our own sinful hearts. That is definitely uncomfortable. The Apostle John put it this way: *"And this is the verdict: The Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil,"* -John 3:19.

We each face a choice when we encounter Jesus today, similar to those who met Him in the flesh two millennia ago. I can't say that I would have been among those who recognized Him then, but, like He didn't give up on Israel, praise God He doesn't give up on me or you. Today, we can choose to lean in. We can allow His light to wash over us and illuminate the uncomfortable and dark corners of our lives, accepting His love, forgiveness, and learning to live by His example. *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light!*

- 1. Do you think you would have recognized Jesus as the Savior if you had met Him when He walked the earth? Why or why not?**
- 2. God's Spirit was on Simeon when he held Jesus and blessed God for sending Him. Is there a time when you have experienced the Spirit leading you in an unmistakable way?**
- 3. Leaning in to Jesus and His truth is more than a one-time decision – it's a choice we make daily. What are some areas where you are doing well with this? In what areas are you struggling?**
- 4. Consider Matthew 9:35-38 and Philippians 2:5-8. What can we learn from the example of Christ in these verses about walking in the Light?**



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