

*The O Prayers, Pt. 4*  
***Dayspring***  
*Malachi 4: 2; Luke 1: 75-78*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

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Gerrit Scott Dawson**

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The aged Zechariah held his infant son, John. Against all odds, barren Elizabeth had conceived and borne a son. For nine months Zechariah had been unable to speak because he doubted the angel's promise that this birth would occur. With his boy in his arms and his tongue finally loosed, Zechariah burst forth in a prayer still recited around the world:

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High;  
For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
To give knowledge of salvation to his people  
In the forgiveness of their sins,  
Because of the tender mercy of our God,  
Whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high,  
To give light to those who sit in the darkness  
And in the shadow of death,  
And to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Zechariah weaved together phrases from the Hebrew Scriptures into one lovely prayer of praise for the Christ who was to come. This morning we're thinking in particular of Malachi 4: 2, "For you that fear my name, the *sun of righteousness shall rise* with healing in its wings." Remember the line from Hark the Herald Angels: "Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings." Jesus is a rising sun, whose rays bring healing and hope. Zechariah called him the Sunrise. The Dawn. In today's O Prayer, it's *oriens*: the East, where the sun comes up. Or to use the King James, the *Dayspring*. The source of the light. So let's think for a moment about dawn.



Day is always dawning somewhere on earth. Our planet spins. The rotation of the earth makes the sun appear to rise and set. Night is always falling in one part of the world even as dawn is always breaking in another part. It's always sunrise somewhere. But we are small, frail creatures. We can't be everywhere at once.

We can't always travel to catch the dawn. We can only be in one little place at a time. So we experience the sun as rising. We wait for the dawn to come and end the night. Every day we witness the miracle that morning dispels the darkness. So we count on the hope that a new day means a fresh start. Sunrise is a daily picture that gives us courage to go on.

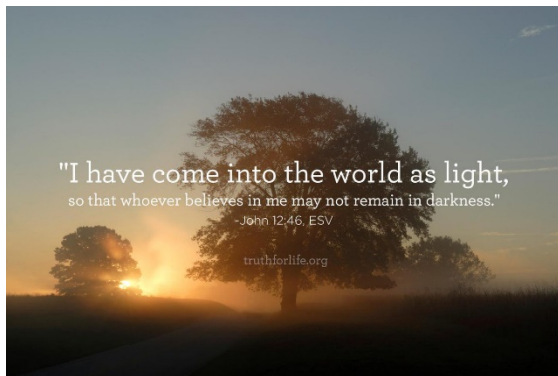
Zechariah sang that we were about to be visited by the Sunrise from on high. That's an interesting way to put it. Because to us, sunrise starts low. First a glow. In the east, objects get clearer. Stars above begin to fade. The sky lightens. Finally, the rim of the sun breaks the horizon. Day begins. Sunrise is from the ground up. But this Sunrise is coming to us from *above*. This is light that comes to us not from the sun but from the source of all light. From God himself, the darkness in our world and in our hearts will be illuminated. This is brightness from the realm of God. Zechariah foresaw a sunrise so glorious it will dispel the gloom of emotional despair. It will flush away even the shadows of death itself. This is the One for whom we have waited!



I want to show you this painting of dawn along the Amazon River. Frederic Edwin Church painted it in 1877 as one of the last in his series depicting the primeval beauty of an undeveloped South America. It's called *El Rio de Luz*, the River of Light. The painting gives us a feel of Eden. Creation unspoiled by human sin. The river and the light seem to be one. Both come from a source beyond this world. Both flow into this world to fill it with wonder and beauty. This is what the old word Dayspring conjures in my mind. Both water from a spring and light that leaps out of darkness. Refreshing springs have a deep source in the ground from which they bubble up. A river of

light flows from God himself, charging the world with grandeur. It's what we feel sometimes deep in our bones when we see something beautiful. This glory has been sent to us as a gift.

Jesus is the true Dayspring. Here's the hidden Source of all that has bubbled up in our midst. He has come to refresh everything. So he says in Revelation, "Behold I make all things new." He is the overflow of the love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit that has poured into our world to cleanse and heal.



In John 12, we read about how passionate Jesus became about his mission as the Dayspring. The Scripture says Jesus *cried out*. That's a very tame translation. The word used there comes from a raven's piercing cry. It means to scream out urgently, with sounds, shrieks that express deep emotion. In other words, Jesus was in earnest. Facing the unbelief of the people, knowing his time was nearing its end, Jesus called out with all his being, "Whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (Jn. 12: 45-46. He's the Dayspring, the Dawn. Seeing Jesus we see his Father, the source of all. We see into the heart of the sunrise. With all his heart, with his very guts, he pleads with the people. "You don't have to stay in the darkness! You're not stuck in the inky black prison. Death need not have the final word. The prison cell of your regrets can be opened. The destruction from you sin can be repaired. The promise is coming true. Those who have sat for years in the darkness have seen a great light. I have come as light into the world. Please believe me. Believe all the way *into* me. Don't stay dying, despairing in the dark. Get up! Get out."

Do we hear him calling to us still? How will we respond? The word for Sunrise in our O Prayer is *oriens*. Like Orient or Oriental. It means East, where sunrise happens. We use the word *orient* when we talk about getting our bearings. I need to get oriented to this city. I go to orientation at my school. We need to get oriented to Jesus who is *oriens*, the source of all light, the dayspring sunrise of life.



Orienteering is a demanding sport that requires athletic stamina and intellectual acuity. Contestants receive a topographical map with their goal. They have to find their way with just the map and a compass. World champion Thierry Gueorgiou from France is known for his incredibly quick skill with the compass and ability to plot the most efficient route.

At Christmas, we are called anew to *spiritual orienteering*. The whole point of advent is to reorient our hearts toward the one who is both the source and goal of life. Jesus is the *oriens*, the light who casts out darkness. He forgives sin. He defeats death. He reorders life toward what matters. Jesus was so passionate about this that he screamed out his urgency. He is the light, so we don't have to stay in the dark anymore. But we do need to get up and move towards him. We have a *map* in Holy Scripture. Everything we need to know about our Dayspring can be known as we ask the Holy Spirit to interpret his Word to us. We have a *compass* in the weekly worship that gets us pointed away from death and toward the sunrise of Christ crucified, risen and coming again. We have companions for the journey in our fellowship that seeks to launch from this place further into the world with gospel news and gospel love.



We have to set our course. To turn from darkness and make for the light. We sail on toward the heart of the sunrise. We believe *into* Jesus, propelling towards him. We sail up the bright river of life, making for the Source as we worship Jesus our Dawn. We leave the destructive patterns of sinful dark and ask Christ to be our guide. He takes the rudder and we engage the adventure. So Paul would write to the Ephesians, "Wake up, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!" (Eph. 5: 14). Onward, dear ones. Onward in hope this Christmas. Onward in faith. Onward in obedience. Onward in mission. Orient your life to the Dayspring. Sail into the Dawn!