



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Advent 2 Wednesday

December 7, 2016

“Light in the Darkness”

(Isaiah 9:1-2)

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“Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by way of the sea, along the Jordan. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Is. 9:1-2).

Collect of the Day: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Have you ever wondered what would happen if the sun simply went out? The first thing we would notice, of course, is deep darkness, darker than any ordinary night, because we would also lose the light of the moon. Remember, the moon only reflects the light of the sun; it doesn't generate any of its own.

If the sun went out, soon it would start to get cold. Really cold. Scientists say within a week, the average global temperature would drop below 0 degrees. Within a year, it would dip to -100. Eventually, the temperature of our planet would stabilize at about -400 degrees.

If the sun suddenly went out, photosynthesis would stop immediately. Plants and trees would soon die. The whole foundation of our food supplies would be wiped out. Oxygen would no longer be produced. In short, if the sun went out, life would soon end.

But thanks be to God, he has created for us a sun which shines and keeps on shining without fail or even much variation. It warms our earth every day. It never burns out like a light bulb. We can count on it. As Orphan Annie sings it, "The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow". It gives us warmth and light and life. So in Genesis, God first creates light, the precondition for life.

But there's also a different kind of darkness in which God has to create a different kind of light. Our text says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."

People who walk in this darkness are those who do not know God and are stuck in their sin. They're in the dark. One only gets out of this deep darkness is through faith.

Psalm 18, “For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness” (v. 28).

However, those who keep rejecting God and his Word eventually fall into a night without morning. In the Bible unbelievers are cast out into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to our eyes these can be really good people: kind, generous, hard working people.

During World War II an aircraft carrier was in the North Atlantic. Six pilots took off from the carrier looking for enemy submarines. While the pilots were gone, the captain of the carrier was forced to issue a general alarm. Every light on the carrier was extinguished for fear it might be targeted by nearby enemy aircraft and submarines. So the carrier was thrown into a strict blackout. It disappeared into the inky darkness of the night. But what about those six pilots who were on patrol? When it was time to come home, they knew their ship was down there somewhere, but they couldn't find her. The pilots broke radio silence to ask the carrier to turn on its lights, but to protect itself and all those on board, the carrier refused, and cut off radio contact. Those pilots were lost at sea.

There's a point to this tragic story. Those pilots, they were all good people. They were doing their duty, and trying to do the right thing. They were all well trained. They were fighting for a noble purpose. But without the light those pilots were lost.

It's no different for the rest of humanity. People can be kind, noble, committed and live every minute of their lives for others. They can try as hard as they can, but without the light of Christ, they are still lost, helpless, condemned. And that's where we would all be . . . were it not for the grace of God.

Isaiah begins the chapter with these mysterious words, “But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.” Isaiah is saying

God is going to do something big in Galilee. This would have surprised Isaiah's readers.

He mentions the land of Zebulun and Naphtali which comprised Galilee. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the tribes of Israel who settled the northern most border of the kingdom. Isaiah writes, "In the past God humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali." Of course, that's how it always happened. Whenever an army invaded, it was usually from the north because from the east and the south they would have to go through blistering and inhospitable deserts, and from the west, it would have to be a costly invasion by the sea. So enemies usually invaded from the north, which meant the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to fall victim, and they would be the last to be freed from the enemy's oppression. Galilee of the nations was the first to be humbled, the last to be freed.

That God is going to do something great in Galilee makes no sense on a number of levels. Isaiah calls it Galilee of the nations because it's surrounded by the nations, by Gentiles: the Phoenicians, the Samaritans, the Babylonians, and a little further away the Assyrians. And it was thought that all that exposure to the Gentiles corrupted their theology. The further away you get from Holy Jerusalem, the more suspicious your doctrine and life.

It's surprising that it would all begin in Galilee. Galilee is way up north. The capital city, Jerusalem, is to the south in Judah. That's where all the action happens. The great city of Jerusalem is the real center of royal power. Jerusalem also has God's Holy Temple in it. Jerusalem is also the center of Rabbinic wisdom and has all those libraries and priests and scribes and Pharisees. Why would God choose Galilee? Why would God choose Galileans with their strange accent? (Remember how Peter was identified in the courtyard of the high priest by his Galilean accent? Mt. 26:73) Galileans were a people cut from a different cultural cloth. Yet Isaiah prophesies that it is in lowly Galilee that God is going to do something great.

It had to surprise Isaiah's readers. We know it

surprised Nathanael. Remember what he said? When Philip finds Nathanael, and says to him, “We have found [the Messiah], Jesus of Nazareth”, Nathaniel replied “Nazareth! Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1: 46). Nazareth was, of course, smack dab in the middle of Galilee. Imagine, a Galilean Savior with his Galilean disciples.

Yet his light and salvation are not just for the Galileans. Remember what Jesus said? “I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

It’s no surprise then that even at his birth, there is great light in the darkness. “The glory of the Lord shone around [the shepherds].” And remember what lead the wisemen to the manger? Remember when he was transfigured? Matthew said, “His face shown like the sun.” Remember his appearance at the resurrection? Matthew says it was as bright as lightening (28:3). Remember when Jesus intercepted Saul as he traveled to Damascus? Acts 9 says, “suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him” (v. 3).

In John 3 Jesus says, “The Light has come into the world.” If it’s for the world it’s also for you. Acts 26 says, “He would proclaim light both to the Jews and to the Gentiles” (v. 23).

Moreover, you’ve been baptized into Christ. Through his Word, you are a believer. 2 Corinthians 4, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” So what Paul writes in Colossians 1 applies also to you: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (v. 13). And what he writes to the Christians in Ephesus is also for you, “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (v. 8). 1 Peter 2: 9 also applies to you. He “called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Because you are in the light of Christ, you have nothing to fear. Psalm 27, “The LORD is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear?” (v. 1)

NASA scientists estimate our sun will eventually burn out. But no need to worry. It won't happen for another 4.5 billion years. That's must be God's handiwork. You try to make something shine for 4.5 billion years.

In any event, the promise is that in our home in heaven there will be no sun or sunlight, but it also won't be dark or cold. Revelation 21 says it "has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk . . . and the gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there" (v. 23ff).

It all started in the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, Galilee of the nations. "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." Thanks be to God. Amen.

