



The Light – Touchpoint for December 22, 2021

“Behold, the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:2)

“Arise, shine, for your light has come.” (Isaiah 60:1)

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

Grace and peace from the Light in whom we live and move and have our being.

In a few days, on Christmas eve, many of us will gather in our darkened churches, with very little light, and light a candle.

We will gather on Christmas eve, in a season of darkness. Christmas eve is, almost to the day, but not quite, the shortest day of light in the calendar year.

Slowly our hemisphere has crept into winter. The long, cold, dark and dreary season of winter. And it is at this time of the year, that the church has chosen to celebrate the birth of Christ, whom we proclaim as the light of the world.

It is a strange juxtaposition, I suppose. Some have likened it to pulling on Superman's cape, or spitting into the wind. But here we are, in the dead of winter quoting Isaiah “Behold, the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light.” Or, “Arise, shine, for your light has come.”

I remember once seeing a sign in a pastor's office that read, “Due to the current financial crisis, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off.”

It can apply to many things in our lives, not just financial concerns. Due to the drug or alcohol problem, our family problem, our great political problems, the light at the end of the tunnel seems to have been turned off. We have all felt this way at one time or another. Our personal struggles with family, relationships, and work, seem not to be a tunnel to somewhere else. Life can at times, both literally and figuratively, seem like a dead end. The light at the end of the tunnel appears to be extinguished.

But the Christmas story tells us that the light at the end of the tunnel is not only still there, but is coming to us. And no...it isn't a train. It's a savior. And it isn't just coming to those who have their act together, or to those for whom life is already sweetness and light.

Look at the Christmas story. The angels first appeared to shepherds in the field. And let me share with you a little about shepherds in those days.

In those days, society stereotyped shepherds as liars, degenerates and thieves. The testimony of a shepherd was not admissible in court, and many cities had ordinances barring shepherds from entering the city limits. The religious community took a particularly dim view of them since the exercise of their duties prevented them from observing the Sabbath and rendered them ritually unclean. The Pharisees classed shepherds with tax collectors and sinners by virtue of their vocation.

Such was the status of the people to whom the announcement of Jesus' birth was made. And the text tells us they were afraid when they first encountered the angel of the lord. And well they should have been. For they had no doubt been told all their lives that God would eventually come and slaughter the unrighteous.

Talk about no light at the end of the tunnel, or that light being a train. These shepherds had every reason to be afraid.

But instead of darkness and wrath. Good news is spoken. "BE not afraid. I bring you Good News of great joy which will come to ALL people. For to you is born this day a savior, who is Christ the Lord."

In other words, "The light has come to you."

It is amazing isn't it. The people whose testimony was not admitted in court are the first people called to bear witness to the birth. Those who are barred from the city are told to go into the city of Bethlehem. The people classified as sinners due to their vocation are the first to see the Christ child.

It is this story that led Martin Luther to write, and it is one of my favorite quotes of his.

"Everyone strives after that which is above him, after honor, power, wealth, and knowledge, a life of ease, and whatever is lofty and great. And where such people are, there are many hangers-on. All the world gathers round them, gladly yields them service, and would be at their side and share in their exultation. On the other hand, no one is willing to look into the depths, with their poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery, and anguish. From these all turn their eyes. Where there are such people, everyone takes to his heels, forsakes and shuns and leaves them to themselves. No one dreams of helping them or of making something out of them ... Therefore, to God alone belongs that sort of seeing that looks in the depths with their needs and misery, and is near to all that are in the depths."

It is left to God alone to shine God's light on these people. And it is to these the light has come. It is for these that the divine light is incarnated.

The light of which we speak does not come out of some naive, Pollyanna view of the world. The light of which we speak is a light which has seen the depths of the human experience. And has kept shining. It has experienced rejection, denial, and betrayal. It has cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

You know, we think that it is on Good Friday, on the cross, that God sacrifices God's self. But actually, it's at Christmas, in the incarnation, that the Divine is sacrificed. Think of the words we most often use to describe God. All-knowing, All-powerful, All-present. But here, at Christmas, in the incarnation, God sacrifices all of that to be at-one with us. God sacrifices it all to live and dwell amongst us. God sacrifices it all to bring the light to us.

It is a light the world tried to snuff out on Calvary, but it could only be dimmed for a few days until it exploded once again on the world's scene.

It is the light of God's grace that simply cannot and will not be dimmed by the world's sin, the world's rejection, the world's hatred.

As John puts it, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

We cannot turn it on or off. Like the sun we are called to simply live under it. It is a light that will continue to shine on all who experience darkness in their lives.

To you is born a savior. To you the light has come. This is our hope this coming Christmas Eve and all the eves of our lives. That God will shine the light of his grace on us and our world.

On Christmas Eve we hear the story that the light shines on us all. “Be not afraid. I bring you Good News of great joy which will come to ALL people. For to you is born this day a savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

In baptism, that light becomes a laser beam on us as individuals. “I baptize YOU...in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” In Holy Communion it becomes a lamp to chase away our darkness, “This cup is the New Covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people, for the forgiveness of sin.”

Christmas is a time of light, in the midst of darkness. And we don't have to go to it. It comes to us.

As the days get shorter and shorter, and the darkness of our world seems to get longer and longer. We plant the season of Christmas, of light and hope, squarely in the midst of our darkening world and say.

“The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness cannot overcome it.”

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taze Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Within Our Darkest Night

(The Songs of Taize Session Singers)

Within our darkest night, you kindle a fire that never dies away

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Silent Night

(North Hollywood Holiday Choir)

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright. Round yon virgin, mother and child. Holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight. Glories stream from heaven above, Heavenly hosts sing hallelujah. Christ the savior is born.

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, loves pure light. Radiant beams from thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus lord at thy birth.

The Meal

Joy to the World

(The Don Jense Chorale)

Joy to the world, the lord is come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. And heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the savior reigns. Let men their songs employ. While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy.

Benediction