

12-24-18 Christmas Eve sermon Isaiah 9:2 A Great Light

Dear Worshipers at the Manger:

The soldier lay in the hole he had crawled into at sunset.

- The cold night settled over him
- An eerie silence shrouded the battlefield
- The place of fire and fury had become an icy tomb

He needed to move, to get back to his lines, to rejoin the others.

But which way? He had no idea.

- Turned and turned again during the fighting
- Running and often falling
- Now in the darkness, he was completely lost
- As lost as he had ever been – as lost as anyone can be

Going the wrong way could cost him his life. Not going at all could mean freezing, capture or worse.

He tried to pray.

- The words did not seem to come
- He had not prayed much in the years since he left home
- Somehow God had slipped away...

Pray. Prayer. What prayer?

The word brought a clear picture of his mother to his mind

- Every evening she would gather the family by “the altar”
- And there on an old table with a piece of white cloth on it she would light a candle and they would pray.
- He always thought is such a bother, so silly, all of them praying on their knees in front of a broken-down table and an old, bent candle.

“I don’t need this!” he would grumble---more and more as he got older.

- Just come and pray his mother would say to him
- But what for? He would reply to his mom
- Some day his mother said it will light your way

The darkness pressed on him.

- God remember me
- God help me
- Stumbling prayers...what should he say...what could he say?

He waited for an answer but there was nothing but night and silence and cold. Finally, he raised his head just above the edge of the hole and squinted into the gloom.

There! Off there, barely visible in the mist he saw a flame --- a single, silent flame.

- What was it?
- Could he trust it?
- Could he follow it?
- There was nothing else to do.
- He began to crawl toward the flame, toward the tiny, flickering flame.

After what seemed like hours he broke into a clearing. There were the others, soldiers he knew, huddled around a little fire.

“Hey soldier” his sergeant whispered. “Where have you been?” You look a little lost.”

The fire still peeked at him between the gathered figures in the darkness.

- The fire, he muttered
- The sergeant came closer.
- Just a little while ago the captain said we would risk one small fire to help keep warm
- But we have got to put it out soon because of the enemy

The soldier got to his knees and stared at the flames in wonder.

- It looked like a candle
- From out there---from out there in darkness, it looked like an old, bent candle I used to know.

The Bible say: “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

The soldier in our story certainly was in the dark.

- Darkness surrounded him, trapped him, held him captive

- Left on his own, he had no idea where he was, where he could go, where he would be safe.

Confusion

- The darkness describes our story
- The story of all of us

On our own, we are left in the spiritual darkness of this world.

- It is a deep darkness, a blinding darkness, a darkness that we cannot overcome on our own.
- We have the illusion that we can make our own light
- We think we can find the way, make our own way by the light of our intelligence, our wisdom, our inborn ability to be light to ourselves.

But we are no more able to create our own light than was the soldier in the story. All of us are lost in the darkness of sin and we cannot fix it, make our own light.

All of us, all of humankind is unable to create anything but the illusion of light.

- **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.** All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” Rom 3:11-12
- “For there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Rom 3:23

Our spiritual situation is no different from the soldier lost on the battlefield. We know there is a path ahead that will lead to life.

But where is it?

How do we find it? That’s where the flame comes in.

This Christmas celebration is not just a happy time to give and receive gifts, decorate the house, recite the Christmas story.

This is the time we celebrate the light that has been placed in our life and in our future.

Indeed, it is God’s light.

“We are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Romans 3:24-25

Propitiation = Mercy Seat of the Old Testament Temple where the blood of the sacrifice was splattered for the forgiveness of sins.

Indeed, we are those who walked in darkness, at least we were destined to before we were received into God's kingdom by Baptism.

- We are now his own, marked with the cross of Jesus Christ
- We are filled with the light that is the grace of God in Jesus Christ
- We have a light that will guide us through life and bring us to eternal life

Certainly we can turn away from the light.

In fact, for all of us, there are times when the light seems to fade. But the Spirit does not leave us.

Sometimes we simply wander into what we think we want or what we deserve. Because of our sin, we deserve nothing but judgment and separation from God.

- But Jesus acts for us.
- He goes to the cross for us.
- He gains forgiveness and life for us and offers it to us as a gift

Gifted children of God, we now walk by faith, by the light of faith in a dark and dismal world.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:14ff

The one who is the light of the world, now names us the light of the world.

- We become light by the grace of God
- We give off light, not just keep it for ourselves
- We can no more hide the Good News of God's salvation in Jesus than we can hide the spiritual light that is now in us.

Darkness – sin, death, evil – still exist and will always exist in this life.

Love + Grace + Hope

Christmas is the story of how light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it. The light that shines allows us to see through the darkness the shadows of the love, grace and hope that have found us.

The flickering light provides us a glimpse of the companions that hold our hands, kiss our lips and walk with us...God's love, grace and hope given to us.

Shine, Jesus, shine.

This is the Christmas message of joy.

- "You are the light of the world" Matthew 5:14
- The lights of Christmas remind us that the light of God's salvation has come as a baby in a manger.
- And the lights of Christmas remind us that we are light to those who still sit in darkness.

O Lord, set us on fire and makes us into lights to guide and lead the lost ones to the light of life.