



Longing for the Light

WAITING FOR GOD
TO ARRIVE AT ADVENT

CHRISTMAS EVE

ISAIAH 9:2-7

Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

LUKE 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

At the beginning of Advent, we recognized that to some degree or another Advent begins in the dark. Today we remember and celebrate that into the darkness stepped the light of the world. The language and dualism of darkness and light is an important motif in the biblical story. This language reaches a climax when we consider the nativity story. Our readings have emphasized this.

First, in the Isaiah passage we were told “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.”

Then, Luke reminded us of shepherds in the wilderness who were minding their own business tending to their sheep. Suddenly in the middle of a dark dark night, the sky was ablaze with light of one angel, and then countless angels, a whole choir of them. They went from deep darkness to blinding light. Light in the midst of darkness, for those walking and working in darkness.

But what is this light? For Isaiah, the light was a child, a son to be born. And he will be the one called *wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father* and *prince of peace*. Strong and powerful words that function as a reminder to Judah that the Lord would deliver them from Assyria. Centuries later, these words are re-understood to remind God’s people that he is delivering them once again.

In Luke, the light are angels but these angels are merely heralds of good news meant to direct the shepherds to the true light. **This light is the child who would enlighten the hearts and eyes of all humanity.** But why? Why do the hearts and eyes need to be enlightened? Because, for some reason or another we seem to find comfort with the darkness. For some reason, darkness speaks to us and seems to offers us a place of apparent safety.

Yet, as with every year, our Christmas hope and joy is that against this almost embodiment of darkness stepped the personification of light. Jesus, the light of the world, the image of the invisible God and the morning star.

The morning star imagery is so poignant and appropriate here. For generations navigators used a star that they called the Morning or Evening Star. In reality, this star turned out to be planet Venus. Venus can functions both as evening and morning star. When it functions as the morning star, Venus rises a bit before the sun. Sometimes an hour or two but sometimes it could be as little as mere moments. What is most relevant is not when but the symbolism of the rising of the morning star. When the

morning star rises, night is over, dark has been defeated and day is upon us. The sun is about to rise and then there will be light.

In the northern hemisphere, Christmas comes just a few days after the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, when the darkness is the longest. And we can fear the night and darkness, even with the invention of artificial light. In the world in which Jesus entered specifically, people had all the more reason to be fearful of the darkness of night. There was the constant threat of violence and theft. Darkness was not safe and rarely would anyone risk entering it to come to your aid. So when night came you found safety, partially out of wisdom and partially out of fear.

We might fear the dark but the darkness fears the light. Light reveals and exposes. Light makes things known. Light shows that the monster in your closet, is just a dress shirt, or a sweater. Light reveals how things truly are and the darkness cannot stand that.

On the first Christmas, into the dark world stepped Jesus, the light of the world. He entered as a baby, the baby promised generations before his birth, the baby whose pregnancy reveal was done by an angel, the baby whose birth was declared by a choir of the same angels, the baby whose first visitors worshipped him. This is one who stepped into the dark world and by stepping down, turned on the lights in a world that so desperately needed it and for people who still need it the same.

Often on Christmas Eve, churches will sing Silent Night by Candlelight. The advent wreath will be full light, culminating with the one in the centre, the Christ candle. From the Christ Candle, little by little the entire sanctuary is light by little candles in the hands of the congregation. The light of the Christ Candle make its way around the room to symbolize Jesus as in-breaking light, to exemplify Jesus as the light of Christmas. Amidst the darkness, the morning star appeared. When things seemed bleakest, we are told "A light has come."

That line is from the song, *Oh Light*, by Gungor that captures this idea beautifully. They capture the hope and longing that is realized in the coming of Jesus, the light of the World. As we reflect on Christmas and the light who came to conquer the darkness, I encourage you to listen to it.