

1. *Created Light*

Introduction:

We take so much for granted. We walk outside and experience the world around us. We see the sky, the trees, the ocean, the mountains, any of which is large enough to overwhelm us as we try to consider its beauty and magnitude. From our experience, there has never been a time when those things did not exist. It would be easy for us to take them for granted. One of those things that we take for granted is light. At this time of year, we are surrounded by the beauty of lights – Christmas lights, candles, the glow of a fireplace, etc. However, there was a time they did not exist. In fact, there was a time when nothing existed at all - nothing, that is, except the God that made all we see and experience.

But God had a plan. He was going to create something new. He wasn't just going to simply create the world, wind it up, start it spinning, and walk away. He would bring order out of chaos. He would take that which was formless and empty and make it into something spectacular. The world began with a sound – The sound of the almighty God's voice – "Let there be light." And so, the work of creation begins.

Light would bring life into this world. Light enable life to live in this world. Light would let all of creation see the almighty God create a magnificent world. Let us here the account of *Created Light* in our first reading: Genesis 1:1-5:

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day.

2. *Light Covered by the Shadow of Sin*

Introduction:

Do you like Wisconsin winters? Do you like the cold? Do you like the snow? I think the hardest part about winters in Wisconsin is these long stretches of cloudy days that we seem to get. I can't even imagine what it must be like living in Barrow, Alaska.

Barrow is now in a period of 7-10 weeks without the sun. They experience between 51-67 days with no sun beginning in November and ending in January. After the weeks of darkness pass, it is time once again for 11 weeks of sun with no sunset. The sun is up 24-hours a day beginning in early May, and does not set again until early August.

God created a perfect world – world of light. But soon that world would be shadowed in darkness – not the darkness from the sun. It would be shadowed in the darkness of sin. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin cast a shadow over the world. Humanity was left in the shadow of darkness. Sin would now separate mankind from its Lord and Creator.

This was not the kind of darkness that might last a few weeks. This is a darkness that threatens mankind for an eternity. We need this shadow of darkness gone. We need light. But there was nothing that we could do to remove this shadow. Sin was now part of this world.

Why would Adam and Eve listen to Satan? All they had to do was turn away from Satan. You wonder didn't they suspect something was wrong when a snake began to talk to them. After all, Adam knew the animals of Creation since he gave them all their names.

Why do you listen to Satan? Why do I listen to Satan? He's good at what he does. Sin messes up creation and the hearts of people. Let us listen to the consequences that this shadow of sin now brings to God's perfect world as we hear God speak in Genesis 3:1-6 and Romans 5:12:

Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:1-6, Romans 5:12

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.... 12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.

3. The Light of Promise

Introduction

After this world was covered with the shadow of sin, it needed light once again. God gave that promise of light already back in the Garden of Eden. God promised that a descendant of Adam & Eve would crush the dark head of Satan. Even though darkness covered their souls, light once again would shine in their hearts. This was good news to Adam and Eve.

We, also, live in a world that is covered by the shadow of sin. Watch or read the news every day, and you will see what sin has done to this world. It has brought unrest, rebellion, destruction, war, hurt to a world that God had created perfectly. After time, we are tired of hearing about murders, theft, wars, etc. We also need and long for good news.

God has some important news for you and me that He doesn't want any of us to miss tonight. He points us to Someone. He wants our full attention. God has some huge news for us today. God's chosen servant is coming to this world to once again to cast the dark shadow of sin away. This servant would please his heavenly Father perfectly.

God's justice demands that sin would be paid for completely as the Apostle Paul would say: **"The wages of sin is death."** There is no getting around it. There is no loop hole to escape this justice. There would be only 1 person who would be able to make things right. That would be God himself.

That is the Good News that God shares with the world tonight – Light has once again come. The broken relationship between God and mankind has been restored through faith in Christ Jesus. This servant comes not shouting or raising voices in the street. He comes to restore the smoldering wicks and the broken reeds of this world.

God's servant came to serve as more than just a "pick-me-up" when life knocks us down. He doesn't come to us and say: *"Keep your chin up! Hang in there! Life is going to get better!"* He says to us: *"I will lift you up. I will strengthen you and help you through the challenges of life. I will make all things better both for you now and in the life to come."*

Let's listen to Isaiah speak about that promise of Light in the 42nd chapter of the book of Isaiah:

Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7

^{42:1} **"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." ⁵ This is what God the Lord says — he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ⁶ "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.**

4. The Light Is Born

Introduction

Things are not always what they seem to be. As someone walked the streets of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night, they would hardly have noticed Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the stable. The full Light now returned to this world when God sent His Son, Jesus to be born to live, die and rise again as the brightness of our salvation. The First Christmas was full of light.

Perhaps, some of you have already opened the Christmas gifts under the tree. Some may be waiting a few more hours until Christmas morning. No matter when we may open our gifts to each other, we can marvel at the greatest gift that God has given us over 2,000 years ago in a small manger in Bethehem. Yet, that little baby is the reason that we have light in our lives.

There is not any other gift in this world that lasts forever. Think of the many gifts over the years that have made their way to a landfill somewhere or a long lost corner of our basements. The gift of Light that God shared with this world in Jesus will last an eternity. Through faith in Jesus that light will always shine in our hearts. Let us read responsively the familiar words of Luke 2:

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-7 (by Pastor & Congregation)

- P:** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- C:** **And everyone went to his own town to register.**
- P:** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.
- C:** **He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.**
- P:** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,
- C:** **And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**

5. *The Light Is Proclaimed*

Introduction

I have often wondered what it must have been like for those shepherds outside of Bethlehem the night that Jesus was born. Many years ago, when we lived in Florida, we would occasionally see the night sky lit up by the launch of a space shuttle. Even though we lived hours away from Cape Canaveral, we could very easily see the light from the solid rocket boosters as they pushed that shuttle up into space.

Yet, that light was nothing compared to the light that shone as the multitude of angels appeared shouting: **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."**

How could the angels not shout? God was going to solve the problem of sin in this world. The plan that he had carefully set in motion way back in the Garden of Eden was now beginning. For that child in the manger was bringing true peace to this world.

Let us speak that message that was proclaimed by the angels as we read responsively the words of Luke chapter 2.

Reading: Luke 2:8-14 (by Pastor & Congregation)

- P:** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.
- C:** **An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.**
- P:** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
- C:** **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**
- P:** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
- C:** **Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."**

6. *The Light Shines in Hearts*

Introduction:

The message of Christmas is simple. God sent his own son to be the Light of the world. Yet, our problems, selfishness, ignorance and sin can still make our world a dark and gloomy place. We darken relationships with family and friends. We ignore the strong light of God's Word at times. We fail to reflect the brightness of Christ's love.

But the story of Jesus' birth is not a fairy tale about a baby born long ago. Jesus was born to grow up and die and rise again to bear the burden for all our sin. His Light dispels the darkness of guilt. Like a lantern in a deep and dark cave, Christ is the Light that saves us. May that Light always shine in your hearts always. Let us continue to read the Christmas story found in the Gospel of Luke:

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:15-20

- P:** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."
C: **So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.**
P: When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,
C: **And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.**
P: But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
C: **The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**