



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Isaiah 9:2

December 4, 2011
English Standard Version

“God Shines”

Isaiah 9:2

“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.”

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. Thank You for this church family. Lord, as we come to your Word, we pray that You would give us eyes to see – as our eyes are often blinded by the darkness. Give us ears to hear- as our ears are often filled with noise. Give us minds to understand – as our minds are prone to wander. Focus us on Your Word and on Your Son. We desperately need Him this morning. Help us to see Jesus today, in His holy and precious name, we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Degrees of Darkness¹

Have you ever been anywhere where it was really **dark**? I mean, so **dark** that you couldn't see anything ... anything at all?

I remember back in the late 1980's, when I was in the Army Reserves; I was assigned for several weeks to a Basic Training Brigade at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. And one weekend, when we were off-duty, several of us were able to go off and visit the Mammoth Caves National Park there in Kentucky.

The Mammoth Caves is the largest underground cave system in the United States. It's

1 The Introduction is adapted from my sermons, “A Witness for Christ,” 9/17/06 and “The Light of the World,” 4/1/07, both given at Potomac Hills during our series on the Gospel of John.

hard to describe how big they are and how far underground they stretch. They have mapped over 350 miles of caves and passageways and they haven't mapped it all yet. So here were these great huge caverns hundreds of feet underground and in order to enter them the Park Rangers had strung lights along **dark**, wet, narrow, twisting passageways. Well ... once we reached the bottom and sat down ... the Park Rangers turned off the lights!

It was dark! I mean **really dark!**

You couldn't see your hand if you held it right in front of your face.

Then one of the Park Rangers moved out to the middle of the cave and lit a match. The whole place lit up and we realized we were in a gigantic cave about the size of this auditorium. And I was struck by the fact that we were seeing this great big cave by the light of one tiny little match that could easily blow out.

And in remembering that incident, I thought how **dark** our hearts must be ... and yet the light of one man, Jesus Christ, is able to flood the **darkness** of our hearts — all of our hearts — with a light that cannot be put out.

There are two books in the Bible that put heavy emphasis on this imagery of **darkness and light**. These books introduce this idea of **light** as a metaphor of spiritual **life**, and **darkness** as a metaphor for spiritual **death**. One of these books is the book we're in today, the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. The other is the Gospel of John — which draws a great deal upon Isaiah. In the Gospel, **light** is used in terms of spiritual enlightenment, or spiritual understanding.

But it's also used as a description of both the person and work of Jesus Christ. Right away, we read, **John 1:4**, "*In Him [Christ] was life, and the life was the **light** of men.*" And we learn that Jesus is not only the **life**, but He's also the **light**. In fact, this is another claim He made for Himself in **John 8:12**, "*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the **light** of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in **darkness**, but will have the **light** of life."*"

And it is Jesus Himself who shines in the darkness. For **John 1:5** says, "*The **light** shines in the **darkness**, and the **darkness** has not overcome it.*"

In **Genesis 1:3-4** we read, "*And God said, "Let there be **light**," and there was **light**. And God saw that the **light** was good. And God separated the **light** from the **darkness**."* God, through His Spoken Word, gave light for the physical world and here in John 1 we read that God, through His Living Word (the Lord Jesus Christ) gave light for the spiritual world. The power of His light exposes the **darkness** of our hearts and the warmth of His light calls us to Him. As David wrote in **Psalms 27:1a**, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear*"

Thus I believe that Christ wants us to live in Him, in the light ... and not to live away from Him in the **darkness** of a world which doesn't understand Him. Later, John would write in **1 John 1:5**, "*This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him **is no darkness at all**.*"

It's the same message today. But it's hard to understand **darkness** without having an understanding of the light. And in a similar way, it's easy to take the light for granted, when you have no real understanding of the **darkness**. We're now in the season of Advent ... and one of the things that's hard to understand about Advent is that **Advent begins in the dark**. So we're going to take some time this morning to talk about the **darkness**.

Oh, there are at least 200 **devotees** of The Lord of the Rings in this congregation, so let me use an illustration. If you've seen the third installment of The Lord of the Rings, *The Return of the King*, you will be very familiar, of course, with the concept of **darkness and light**. In the fictional world ... and let me remind one or two of you, **that it is a fictional world** ... In the

fictional world of Middle Earth, there is a sense arising in the east of the **dark** lord, Sauron, who is attempting to find the one ring of power. That ring forged long ago in Mount Doom, and if it should ever return to Sauron, all would be lost and evil would rule the world and all would become **darkness**. And, as the story goes on, more and more of the world of Middle Earth is getting **darker** and **darker** and **darker**. You remember, of course, what's written on that ring, "*One ring to rule them all, one ring to find them, one ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them.*"

Well, in a sense that's the theme of this passage from Isaiah ... it's about **darkness**, and the power of **darkness**. Impending **darkness** ... **darkness** getting deeper and deeper. He's glimpsing a world that lies in **darkness**.

And so we're going to start with ...

THE DARKNESS OF ISAIAH'S DAY²

Isaiah 8:22-9:2, "*And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.*¹ *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.*² *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.*"

Now, of course, every text in Scripture has a context, and this is certainly true of this particular text, familiar as it is to us, not the least from Christmas carols and Handel's *Messiah*. It's one of the great texts of the Old Testament, pointing forward to the coming of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of that Seed of promise, promised in the Garden of Eden in **Genesis 3:15**.

Everything about the context here is **dark**. The closing verse of chapter 8 — it's actually the first verse of the Hebrew text, but it's the closing verse of our English text in **Isaiah 8:22**, "*And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and **darkness**, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick **darkness**.*"

Now what is Isaiah talking about here?

Well, Isaiah lived at a time in the seventh and eighth century B.C. when there was the impending threat of the Assyrian Empire that would come down and ransack and destroy the Northern territory of Israel with its capital city in Samaria, in 721 B.C. Indeed, in Isaiah chapter 8 — chapter 8 is all about the coming of the Assyrian invasion, and one of the prophecies given to Isaiah is of his own son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz [isn't that a wonderful thing to call your son, by the way?], and that this little boy, Maher-shalal-hash-baz ... that his son won't be old enough to say "Mommy and Daddy" before the Assyrians come down and overtake the Northern Kingdom of Israel with its capital in Samaria.

In this passage Isaiah is speaking about the fate the Northern Kingdom — the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, two of the tribes that made up the nation-state of Israel, as distinct from the Southern Kingdom, the nation-state of Judah. And he's talking about the fact that they're already experiencing the **oppression** of an alien invader: the Assyrians who will soon overthrow the Northern Kingdom have already begun to make their presence and power felt in this area,

2 The Exposition of the text has adapted material from the Sermons, "A Light for Those in Darkness," 12/9/07 by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan; "*From Light to Darkness*," 12/11/05 and "*Arise, Shine, For Your Light has Come*," 12/18/03, both by Dr. Derek Thomas, all of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, www.fpcjackson.org.

Galilee of the Nations. And Isaiah is the only Old Testament writer to use that term. It's very significant. We'll see it come up again when we turn to the New Testament.

It was under the reign of the kings in the Northern Kingdom that Baal worship came to be practiced by the people of the Northern Kingdom, and Isaiah is announcing **God's judgment** through the Assyrian invaders because of the sin of idolatry in the Northern Kingdom. And so what's being painted here is a picture of the **darkness** not simply of a national oppression by an alien invader, but a **darkness** which had been brought about by sin. In other words, the **misery** that is being experienced by the Northern Kingdom is **God's judgment** on them for worshiping other gods. So their **distress** has been brought about by sin. The **darkness** of death which is upon them is in fact **God's judgment** for their idolatry, and there is no distress which is deeper than the misery which is brought by sin.

Isaiah is giving us a prophecy about the coming invasion and the ultimate fall of the Northern Kingdom, an event which has not yet happened; but then, he is giving us a prophecy about the Lord's rescue and salvation of that people. And so it's not a passage that at first glance you'd expect to contain a clear foreshadowing and prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ, but of course the New Testament tells us that that's precisely what it does. And we'll see why as we work through it today.

Assyria will, over the next century, threaten the Southern Kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem, but it will be another empire, the empire of Babylon, that will eventually come down and ransack the city of Jerusalem and destroy the Temple of Solomon and take into captivity some of the young men of Judah and Jerusalem — Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, from the Book of Daniel — so from 721 to 586 B.C., right through to the Babylonian kingdom and the Babylonian invasion and the Babylonian exile for 70 years in the future, so as far as Jerusalem is concerned ... **the next 200 years is darkness.**

Can you imagine that? We've gone through another recession, and they say we're coming out of it now. Maybe ... hard to tell. But imagine if they said, "Look, we know we're in a recession, and it's probably going to turn into a full-blown economic, spiritual, and social depression. But good news! Things are going to turn around and everything's going to be fine by ... **2212.**"

2212 !?!? What? Are you kidding me? We'll all be **dead** by then! Who would accept that as "Good News"? If that happened, we'd all sink further into gloom and anguish. It's like a land that is "*always winter, and there is no Christmas.*" It's a time of gloom, and a time of despair. But now ... into that **despair** and into that **sorrow** and into that **darkness shines a light**: a light that is going to grow and grow and grow until you turn from Malachi to Matthew, and you see its glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ. It's the fulfillment of a promise that God had spoken, that He will save His people through a Mediator, a Savior, a Seed born of a woman and made subject to the Law.

In the **seventh** chapter of Isaiah, which we read last Sunday, the promise of the Seed that would be born of a virgin, **Isaiah 7:14**, "*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*" In the **sixth** chapter, the chapter before that, Isaiah, you remember, had seen a great vision of One who is high and lifted up, and seated upon a throne, who is "**Holy, Holy, Holy.**" And both the Prophet Isaiah and Apostle John will tell us that the vision of the One high and lifted up is none other than a vision of Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders is the government of the universe. And slowly but surely, Isaiah is painting for us a picture of Jesus, of Bethlehem, of Christmas.

He's ministering in Jerusalem, in the capital city. He has access to the temple courts and precincts and liturgy. He has access to at least four of the reigning monarchs of his time. And the prophecy of Isaiah begins, you remember, by describing how the people of God entered into the outward rituals of worship ... but their hearts were far from God. They went through the motions of worship, but in their hearts they didn't know Him. They were still **in darkness**.

And this is real **darkness**: an overwhelming, engulfing **darkness**, a **darkness** that destroys, a **darkness** that chokes, a **darkness** that robs you of your breath — "*gloom (verse 1) ... anguish ... contempt; (verse 2) The people who walked in darkness ... who dwelt in a land of deep darkness.*"

And these folk in Jerusalem are walking and living and breathing in the **darkness** and into that **darkness** ... you notice how the first verse of chapter 9 begins with ... "*But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish.*" That's the whole point of it. They may well be in **darkness**, but Isaiah is bringing a message of grace. He's bringing a message of good news; into the **darkness** he's shining a light, into the engulfing cloud he speaks of One in whose face will shine the very glory of God Himself. **They've seen a great light!** He's speaking as a prophet, of course. They haven't seen that light yet.

We're reminded of that at the very end of Isaiah, **Isaiah 64:5-7**, "*You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?* ⁶ *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.* ⁷ *There is no one who calls upon Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.*"

The **darkness** is overwhelming and long-lasting. The people of God in the time of Isaiah were surrounded by **darkness** and slowly, they allowed the **darkness** to fill their lives. And the **darkness** was great, and it lasted for hundreds of years. God **kept sending** prophets; God **kept calling** the people back to Himself, God **kept saving** a remnant of faithful people for Himself. He always has. He always will. He **kept telling** them the light was coming. But if we really understand the Scriptures, we see that the **darkness** of Isaiah's day, though it would be different in form – moving from license to legalism – wasn't really all that different from ...

THE DARKNESS OF JESUS' DAY

Now, had you gone to Jerusalem in Jesus' time you would **NOT** have drawn the conclusion that the land was in **darkness**. It wasn't as though the forms of outward religion were absent. They were very present, they were going through all the outward forms of liturgical worship ... but their **hearts** were still **in the dark**. They still didn't know God, nor did their hearts listen to the notes of grace that echoed from the promises of the gospel that God had made.

There's a marvelous illustration of how pervasive the darkness was in Jesus' time. We find it in **John 3:1-10**, "*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* ² *This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* ³ *Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* ⁴ *Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"* ⁵ *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* ⁶ *That which is*

born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a teacher of Israel, a man who knew his Scriptures back to front; a teacher of budding seminary students, if you will [well, maybe not that]. And Jesus says to Nicodemus 'Unless a man is born again, unless a man is born from above, **he cannot see, he cannot understand the kingdom of God.**' And you know what Nicodemus says? 'I don't understand what You're talking about.' He confirms the very thing that Jesus is saying to him.

And while Jesus tells Nicodemus the best known verse in the Bible, **John 3:16**, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*" He also tells him a few verses later probably the least known verse in the Bible, **John 3:19**, "*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*"

This is so vital for us to understand. In the midst of the Advent season, people love to sing Christmas carols without knowing why Jesus had to come into the world. Very often we hear people say that "**Jesus is the reason for the season.**" Now it's somewhat of a cliché, **but it is true.** We have to ask the question **before** we ask **WHO** the reason for the season is, and that question is "**WHAT'S the reason for the reason?**" It's not just that Jesus is the reason why we celebrate Advent; it is that there is a **reason** why Jesus had to come into this world, and that **reason** is the **darkness** of sin and the misery that comes with it.

Matthew beautifully shows how this passage points to **exactly** that truth in Matthew 4. Let me ask you to turn with me there. Matthew tells us that this passage is fulfilled over 700 years later, when Jesus, having come out of the wilderness – where **who** was tempting Him? Satan was tempting Jesus, in the first verses of chapter four. And He comes into the city of Nazareth, and He departs from it into Capernaum – where? Into Galilee of the Gentiles, into the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, and He preaches the gospel.

And listen to what Matthew says in Matthew 4, starting at verse 12, **Matthew 4:12-20**, "*Now when [Jesus] heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth He went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

¹⁵ "*The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles —*

¹⁶ *the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.*"

And then Matthew says:

¹⁷ *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

And so the person and preaching of Jesus in Galilee of the Gentiles, Matthew says, **fulfills the passage** we have just read today.

The prophet Isaiah is telling us that light is in the distance, that light is down through the corridors of the centuries that will follow; but as a prophet he speaks in faith and he says "*These people who walk in darkness, they have seen a great light.*" And then Matthew and John are

telling us **that light has come**. Matthew tells us that “*Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*” And the beloved disciple, John, writes directly to our hearts, “*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the **light** of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in **darkness**, but will have the **light** of life.”*”

Now, I wonder this morning, is that your testimony? You’ve come here this morning and can you say in the very depths and recesses of your heart and experience and emotions, “**I have seen the light!** I’ve seen the light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ, a **resplendent incandescence** that glows with such glory that like Moses you want to hide your face from it.”

Darkness ... and into that darkness ... **LIGHT**. Sometimes when I come here early in the morning, and that’s very rare now, but a long time ago I used to come into this temporary sanctuary here, there are no windows, of course, and **it’s very dark**. And then someone is turning on the lights — these lights. And Isaiah is saying ‘God has put the light on so that you can see your sin and your Savior, your need of God’s provision.’

Is your life a living testimony to ...

THE DIFFERENCE OF THE LIGHT

Isaiah 60:1-3, “*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*”

Well, in a sense that’s the theme of this closing passage from Isaiah: it’s about **darkness**, and the power of **darkness**. Impending **darkness**, **darkness** getting deeper and deeper. He’s glimpsing a world that lies in **darkness**.

And then he sees light ... a light that begins to dawn, begins to shine, and shine brightly, like the dawn of a new day. At first, this light seems to be objective, something out there, but then this light suddenly becomes subjective, something in here. It shines out of this people. It looks and feels like the description of creation, “*In the beginning God said let there be light, and there was light.*” But it’s a work of re-creation here. It’s something future, something that will happen in Isaiah’s future.

And then, **glory**, this light is the **glory** of God. In the Old Testament, the word **glory** carries the associations of weight and worth and value and splendor and dignity, all of which are present when God is said to reveal His glory. It’s **who** He is, it’s **what** He is. God was answering Moses’ plea, you remember, to show him His glory. And what did God show him? A light, a **Shekinah glory**, a **glory** cloud. Hard to describe ... as it was attractive and intimidating all at the same time, and that appeared at various significant moments in redemptive history, the **glory** cloud of God, representing the very presence of God.

And, of course, I’m running ahead of myself a little now, but you need to remember of course, that when you turn to the pages of the New Testament, that **glory** cloud, that representation of the being and presence and dignity and splendor of God is made manifest **in the baby lying in the manger in Bethlehem**. **John 1:14**, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His **glory**, **glory** as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

What is God saying?

That the whole course of our salvation, our entire future, rests on a little baby, a little infant, with a head and arms, and tiny little feet, and crying.... (Yes, I know one of our carols says “...no crying He makes”, but I’ve always had theological problems with that! I believe that

Jesus could cry without it being a sinful cry.) **The whole course of our salvation rests in a tiny little infant.**

Why did King Herod, Herod the Great, why did he engage in that pogrom against Bethlehem, against the little infant children? What was Herod so terrified about in a little child? Because Satan understood the significance of the coming of that Child into the world, that's why. Because when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, there was an earthquake in the kingdom of Satan that spelled his doom.

That's what Isaiah is saying to the people of God: the future looks bleak; the future looks terrible; the future is about war and devastation **in this world ... but look again! A light is shining!** And in **that light** will be **deliverance: deliverance** from sin; **deliverance** from the consequences of sin; **deliverance** from hell; **deliverance** from the wrath of God; **deliverance** from the judgment to come, so that we can stand on that Day of Judgment and be assured that our sins are forgiven and that we have peace with God.

CONCLUSION: *The Darkness of Endless Winter*³

In **The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe**, four children enter into the magical land of Narnia, through the back of a large wardrobe in a strange professor's home. When they arrive **it is winter**. The children think it is great fun, until they learn that in Narnia **it has been winter for 100 years**. **And no Christmas!** For Narnia has fallen under the magic of the evil witch, whose reign brings harsh winter conditions to the once beautiful land.

Early on in the story, the children meet Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and are having a meal with them, tucked away in the Beaver's lodge, when they begin discussing this seemingly endless winter. In the midst of their discussion — Mr. Beaver says the most preposterous thing. He says there is reason for hope — **good reason!**

Why? **Because Aslan is on the move.**

Up to this point the children don't know who Aslan is or why he should be the source of such hope in the midst of despair — but they see that the very thought of Aslan at work again in Narnia brings hope to the Beavers and other creatures who have not pledged allegiance to the evil Witch.

Most of us here can understand the thought of a winter that never ends. At some point in our lives, things seem to crash around us, and we can lose the most precious possession in the world — hope. It often seems that God is distant from our world. Many things seem out of control. Bad things happen to good people. Evil seems to triumph. Perhaps life seems like an endless winter with no hope of Christmas ever coming, let alone spring!

But let me tell you something. No matter who you are or what the circumstances of your life are — you have reason for hope. **Good reason!** Why? **Because God is on the move.** And that's what we celebrate at Christmas.

As we heard just a few minutes ago in the reading from the Scriptures, 2,000 years ago God broke through every barrier and sent a frail little baby to perform the important work of establishing His Kingdom once and for all in the lives of mankind. But when he came, it was much like Aslan's arrival in Narnia. It was nearly imperceptible to those living then. For instead of heralding His arrival with loud trumpets in the center of Jerusalem, the Messiah was born in the humblest of ways: to a young Jewish girl, where the animals were kept, and He was laid in a feeding trough with simple cloths wrapped around Him. The angels, when they were finally

3 The Conclusion has adapted material from the sermon, "*Narnia: Got Hope?*" by Don Jacques.

allowed the opportunity to show themselves to the world, heralded Jesus' birth to a handful of shepherds! The coming of Jesus was hardly noticed, and that, **though it seems crazy to us**, is just how God planned it.

This was His plan, because He came for simple and ordinary people, not just for the great and mighty and powerful. He came into the world quietly, bringing with Him that most precious of all commodities — hope.

Hundreds of years before Jesus appeared, the prophet Isaiah looked into the future and spoke about the hope He would bring into the world, *“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.”*

God was on the move 2,000 years ago, but the good news is that God is still on the move today! Although the circumstances of your life may seem like winter — there is reason for hope! God has not abandoned our world, and He definitely has not abandoned you. He quietly comes to each one of us and offers us hope.

- Hope that He will one day come back and make all things right.
- Hope that you can be forgiven for your sins.
- Hope that one day you can live forever with Him.
- Hope that no matter how wintry your life may feel today, there is hope for a beautiful

spring!

Once again ... Who is Isaiah speaking of? Could he be talking about the incarnation of Jesus? Is that what Isaiah is seeing — looking down the 700-plus years of history to the birth of a Savior in Bethlehem of Judea? ***“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!”*** The words of John in the prologue of his gospel refer, first of all, to John the Baptist.

John 1:6-8, *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the **light**, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the **light**, but came to bear witness about the **light**.”* Jesus, the **light** of the world, and in Him, men and women restored to the image of God, just as at creation when God said, ***“Let there be light.”*** So, He re-creates by His Spirit, and makes us in Christ to be partakers of the divine nature. As we read in **2 Corinthians 4:6**, *“For God, who said, **“Let light shine out of darkness,”** has **shone** in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

This Advent ... think about the darkness ... and the depths of your sin.

And then think about the light ... and the depths of His grace.

You need to pray. Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Oh Lord, our Lord. We are people who are full of sin and sorrow. We say we despair over the darkness that seems to surround us, but truth be told, we really love the darkness. We're afraid of the light. It reveals our sins and shortcomings. It opens our eyes to the need for repentance. It enables us to truly hear the gospel.

Lord, Isaiah is telling us that we desperately need Your grace. And Matthew and John are telling us where to find it — in Your Son Jesus. Let us turn to Him this morning. Thank You for loving us. Thank You that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Thank You that the blood of Jesus covers our sins. For we pray, in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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2 Corinthians 4:6-7

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."