

“Let There Be Light”

Isaiah 9:2-7

Two Sunday's ago, I said in my sermon, “if you want to know who Jesus Christ is, and what God's plan of salvation has always been, read the book of Isaiah.” We read Isaiah's words of comfort from Isaiah 40, and we heard John the Baptist as the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” I said the same thing last Sunday as we turned our attention to our Old Testament reading from Isaiah chapter 61: “for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with a robe of righteousness.”

Tonight, we hear again from the prophet Isaiah. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Jesus Christ is that great light. There is no other. He is the One who clothes you with the garments of salvation and covers you with the robe of His righteousness. As His people, we daily participate in the light of the Gospel which He has brought to us. Tonight, we share that light. This Christmas Eve candle lighting ceremony is one of my favorite services of the year. And that surprises me because we don't share the body and blood of

Christ. For that, we have to wait until tomorrow. But this service is a favorite because it is more than some traditional ritual of feel-good symbolism.

Tonight, we share the light of Christ, not simply the light of a candle. We share the Gospel, the Good News that “to us a child is born, to us a son is given.” The Light of Life promised to this dark, fallen, sinful world has come.

Light is so important in our relationship with God, because it is so important in the history of God’s relationship with His people. When God created the world, the first thing that He created was light. God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is often called the light of the world. St. Paul says that “if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation. The old has gone; the new has come.” You are a new creation.

You are a creation of God, not just because He gave you a body and breathed life into you here on earth, but you are a creation of God because God said to you, “Let there be light.” When you were called to faith in Baptism, God said to you, “Where there was once darkness, let there be light.” The light of Christ is in you. You carry with you the Gospel and the name of God.

This Christmas celebration happens every year because, as God’s new adopted children, we recognize that Jesus entering into the world changed everything. You gather to celebrate each year, because, as God’s child, you recognize that when Christ entered into you, everything changed

for you.

In the beginning of John's Gospel, Jesus Christ is called the incarnate Word of God, the Word made flesh who made His dwelling among us. He still comes to us. That is what we celebrate this evening. The Word of God is, as the psalmist says, "a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Christ comes to us in His Word. God's Word of truth is like the oil in the candles. God lights the flame and gives us the fuel to keep it burning that we never again need walk in the darkness of guilt and unbelief.

However, there are those who imagine that anything can be added to the reservoir of the oil candle and it will keep burning. Throw in some beach sand or coffee grounds and the candle keeps burning. That is the illusion or delusion – that God's Word in its truth is not needed for the flame to keep burning.

It certainly will burn for a while as the remaining pure fuel is soaked into the wick, but as the pure fuel becomes more and more diluted, the fire flickers, fades, and will eventually go out. There is no substitute for the Word of God and the light of Christ.

Light is a very unique thing. When the people who were walking in darkness see a great light, what happens to the darkness that was around them? It disappears. Where there is light, there can be no darkness. When light appears, darkness ceases to exist.

On that glorious eve in Bethlehem that we are celebrating tonight, Jesus Christ, the light of the world, entered into a dark world and everything changed. And since that day, the people of God, of every generation who

have seen that great light who are filled with that light, like them, we never need fear the darkness of guilt or sin ever again. The light of Christ we share is real. He has clothed us in the garments of salvation and covered us with the robe of righteousness.

In a little while, we will gather in the darkness of this night, and we will share that light. The light of Christ symbolized in the passing of the flame from the Christ candle to each one of your candles, and greeting one another with the words, "Merry Christmas".

Our prayer this Christmas is that the light of Christ will continue to shine in our lives even after we snuff out the candle as we walk out the door. We are the children of light. God has said to each one of you, "Let there be light, in you." Let the light of Christ shine in you and through you for all the world to see. May God's Word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

Tonight, we greet one another with the light of Christ, the eternal Word of God who has enlightened this dark world of sin with the bright hope of salvation. Tomorrow, we gather and participate with one another at the Lord's Table as we partake of the broken body and shed blood of the Word made flesh. And the next day, and every day until we see our Lord face to face, we will continue to greet one another with the bright hope of salvation just as we greet one another tonight with the light of Christ. Rejoice that you have seen that great light. And have a Merry Christmas. Amen.