



“The Great Light”

Christmas Eve
2:00, 7:00, 8:30 & 11:00 pm
Saturday, December 24, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 9:2-17

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. ³You 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. ⁴For 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. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For 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. ⁷His 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.

Isaiah 9:2-7

There is a great light coming from 9716 Wendhurst Drive, outside of Richmond, VA, home of Al and Esther Thompson. 16 years building what has been described as the perfectly tacky Christmas display featuring over 170,000 lights and 1,237 homemade cut-out decorations constructed in their workshop, such as Christmas at the Zoo and Pokémon Go, and 36 running reindeer. Over the years featured in a variety of TV shows and this year the Thompson's won \$50,000 grand prize on ABC's holiday light competition "The Great Christmas Light Fight."

The Great... Christmas... Light... Fight... might be a description of our world today. A Light Fight.

Darkness has always been a powerful metaphor for those things in life that oppress, frighten and intimidate us. The darkness causes us worry and anxiety and the joy from our lives.

We know darkness:

- in our physical lives- illness, aging
- in our emotional lives- burdened with worry, confusion, fear, grief, guilt, loss or hopelessness; when we live with violence or addiction or both.
- In our family lives- concern for kids, elderly parents

- in our social lives- failed relationships, estrangement, unkindness
- in our communal lives- injustice, war, terrorism
- in our spiritual lives- prayer empty exercise and worship self-serving, challenges of growing secularism that worships the self

We know darkness.

In the Bible, darkness is the place of chaos and evil- dark places of life- injustice, poverty, oppression, and war

Prophet Isaiah speaking in the midst of 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. **Is. 9**

God's light is not just the antithesis of the darkness- not dualism of other religions- good/bad, ying/yang, light/dark, divine/demonic—Light and dark are not equal. God always greater, wonderful, mighty, everlasting, majestic, not just any light, like switching on a light switch, no this is full blown LED flood lights, every nook and cranny washed with light.

Even the secret places, the places we don't want to talk about.

The word in Hebrew for Light, **or** flame, fire. Same word at beginning of creation, "the light was good." It's the light from the lampstands in the temple. It's the light of a new dawn.

It is you who **light** my lamp; the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness. **Psa. 18:28**

It's the light of the Lord, light in the darkness, and the darkness can never overcome it.

When persons are touched by God in such a way and undergo a personal conversion experience we say "they have seen the light"

Like Shepherds tending their flocks, or Saint Paul, knocked down by bright light or Martin Luther, flash of lightening, vow to become a monk and serve God

Such an experience of light can change the heart and transform one's life. Leads to great belief and trust in the God of light. It gives us hope in a world of darkness. The Psalmist proclaims "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

Here's a story that takes place during the dark winter of 1864, Civil War 3½ years, at Petersburg, Virginia, Grant vs. Lee.

Late one evening one of Lee's generals, Major General George Pickett received word, birth of a son. Up and down the line the Southerners began building huge bonfires in celebration of the event. These fires did not go unnoticed in the Northern camps and soon a nervous Grant sent out a reconnaissance patrol to see what was going on. They returned with the message that Pickett had had a son and these were celebration fires.

Grant, who knew Pickett when they were at West Point, ordered that bonfires should be built. For miles on both sides of the lines fires burned. No shots fired. No yelling back and forth. No war fought, only light celebrating the birth of a child.

The good news of Christmas is that in the midst of a deep darkness there came a great and true light, and the darkness was not able to overcome that light. It was not just a temporary flicker. It was an eternal flame. For the light born Bethlehem was God himself.

It is God's gift of love to us this Christmas.

When we accept the gift, we receive the joy of knowing a Savior and His peace. To accept the gift, we need only to go to the light and be warmed by its love.

May the darkness that you know be consumed by the glory of God tonight. May the Light of Jesus shine... in a Bethlehem stable...in the darkness of life...and in our hearts.

Amen.

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