

Pastor Joe Polzin  
 Luke 2:1-20; Revelation 22:1-5, 16-17, 20  
 “O Come, Emmanuel – Come, O Dayspring”  
 Year B – The Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Eve)  
 December 24, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Dayspring who scatters the darkness. **Amen.**

Tonight, Christmas Eve night, there will be many children who, in the darkness of night, will long for the morning! The other day, our own children asked Jennie and me how early they are allowed to wake us up on Christmas morning. And we gave them very definitive instructions about staying in their room until a certain time and, until then, no waking up mom or dad.

Now, I’m not holding my breath that any of these instructions will be followed. Undoubtedly, they and many children will be up before the break of dawn, while it is still dark out. And even in the darkness of night, there will be for them great anticipation and excitement, because they know what’s coming, and that knowledge brings them hope. Hope for the dawning of a new day and all that comes with it.

Now, have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were praying for daylight, longing for a dark and endless night to pass? Perhaps it was during a storm as you waited in the dark with no electricity and only a few flashlights or candles. You patiently waited for the light, for the storm to pass, so that you could begin to see what was going on around you, to see what damage had been done, and to allow for the recovery to begin.

Or maybe you’ve waited through the night, sick and suffering and finding sleep hard to come by. Or perhaps you have been by the bedside of someone else, keeping watch over a sick or suffering loved one. It’s not that the daylight would bring a change in the illness, but the light helps to banish at least some of the fear of the unknown.

Or maybe you waited through a *season* of darkness in your life, a time of hardship, or sickness, or uncertainty about the future. And all you could do was to hold on for the light, the day when things would hopefully take a turn and begin to get better. I feel like many of us are in that kind of season right now, with the end of this year 2020 and the beginning of the New Year. We are hopeful for a light at the end of the tunnel, but we are still uncertain as to when this darkness is going to end.

Well, there is another kind of darkness, a different kind of night that is even more frightening and even more deadly. Our world is wrapped in the darkness of sin, and it has been since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. That stain of sin was then passed down through the generations like a deadly, inherited disease. Every person is sinful by nature, lost in the darkness. And many in this world are so deep in that darkness of sin that they don’t even recognize they are lost. They remain in the darkness and they remain in their sin.

However, there are those who, by faith, are fully aware of the darkness of their sin and the sin of this world and they long for the light to come. This was the case a long time ago for the faithful of Israel in the Old Testament. They waited in darkness, but they also waited in hope, as they clung to the Word and promises of God.

And through his prophets God promised that he was going to send light into the world. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the “thick darkness” that covered the world and its people, but that light was on the way (60:2). But this wouldn’t be any ordinary light. The Lord promised that he himself was coming into this sin-darkened world. The light of his glory would shine in and through his people and those who sat in darkness would be drawn to the shining light.

We heard about this hope that the people of Israel clung to as it was sung in our Sermon Hymn:

*O Come, Thou Dayspring from on high,  
 And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;*

*Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!* (LSB 357:6)

Centuries after Isaiah, in the little town of Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, who was and is the Son of God. Hidden in the infant in the manger bed was all the astounding glory of God himself, the God who “dwells in unapproachable light,” as Scripture says (1 Timothy 6:16). And yet today, we welcome and worship this light, who came in such an approachable way, a newborn child held in his mother’s arms. This little child is Jesus, who in our Epistle Reading calls himself “the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Rev. 22:16).

Just a few weeks ago I stepped outside while it was still early in the morning, just before any light began to brighten the sky. And at this stage of winter, when the days are shorter, you don’t have to get up quite as early to see that. And I looked up and was astounded by how bright the morning star truly was, which as you probably know, is really the planet Venus. It shines so brightly in the dark sky in the east, where the sunrise will be, as if it’s there to announce that dawn is not that far off. In the early pre-dawn darkness, it signals that daylight is coming, and a new day will soon arrive.

Now, that’s good news for all the children who will be waiting tonight for daylight to arrive on Christmas Day! It’s also good news for everyone who finds themselves in difficult situations longing for the light of the day. And it’s the best news of all for all of us who are longing for the true and shining Light. Jesus, the Morning Star, the Dayspring, brings healing and hope for those who struggle in darkness with illnesses, grief, hardships, sadness, sin, or death. Jesus brings the bright light of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life for us all.

Jesus is the light who was laid in the Bethlehem manger, and who grew up, and lived a perfect life. He willingly suffered and died, and hung on a cross as darkness overtook all the light in the sky one Friday afternoon. He was buried and sealed in the darkness of the tomb. Then, on the Sunday after his death, in the early light of dawn, his tomb was found open and empty! Jesus, the Light of the World, was no longer dead. He rose in triumph, overcoming death itself.

And his victory is now yours, and through faith in him, you too will one day be raised up from death by the one who conquered death for you. And as we said earlier, even in the darkness of night, there is still great anticipation and excitement. Because you know what’s coming, and that knowledge brings you hope. Hope for the dawning of a new day and all that comes with it.

Jesus, who says “I am... the bright morning star,” also promises, “Surely I am coming soon.” This Christmas Eve, we give thanks to the Dayspring from on high who announces to us that a new day is coming. It is the bright, eternal day of life in the new creation, the day when we will be in his presence forever.

He is coming soon, and so we pray, “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” We are those who are waiting for the daylight. “The night is far gone; the day is at hand,” as it says in Romans (13:12). We live now as children of the light. And what we celebrate at Christmas, what we’re celebrating today, is that the Light of the World, the bright Morning Star, the Dayspring from on high is born. Christ is born! And that means his light is sure to follow. In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. **Amen.**