

## **Turning On the Light**

December 24, 2022

Isaiah 9:2-7

“Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if we only remember to turn on the light.” This is a line from one of Katie’s and my favorite movies. As I was preparing for the service for this evening, this was a line that kept playing over and over again in my head, and one that, as odd as it might sound, can be plugged into any of the services for Advent. At its base, it’s talking about changing the tides of something, introducing that which is the opposite of something “dark” or “evil.” At its core, this is a sentence that teaches that it is up to us to create happiness and to “turn on the light.” For example, if we love one another in a world where hatred reigns, happiness can be found. If we choose to be joyful in a weary world, happiness can be found. If we choose to be peacemakers in a world that seems broken and chaotic, happiness can be found. If we choose to have hope that God is at work, even when it feels like God is far off, happiness can be found. However we decide to look at “turning on the light,” it is up to us to share that “light” with the world as once it was shared with us.

The light was first shared with us in a time not unlike our present moment. The nations of Israel and Judah were shrouded in darkness, and not just darkness in the literal sense. They had night and day, but this darkness was greater than just that literal definition. The kings, the religious elite, even common folk were swept up in judging one another as “greater than” or “less than,” and therein more or less worthy of glory, honor, praise, attention, what have you. For that very reason, love was not universal, but rather a commodity to be earned and selectively offered as one deemed fit. Understandably, such a dog-eat-dog mentality, each person trying to earn more, have more, be more than their neighbors, it sounds rather chaotic, does it not? So focused on their own station in life and climbing the proverbial ladder were they that they abandoned God at a moment’s notice to pray to other gods all in the hopes of ascending the ladder faster. People were invariably lost; lost in trying to be the best, lost to society by being marginalized and ignored, everyone lost trying to guide themselves through the darkness if only to survive. Never did the sentence “They were dark days indeed” ever seem to hold more relevance than the days in which Isaiah preached.

Similarly, the Christmas narrative we know is set in that same world of darkness. Israel and Judah are ruled by and heavily taxed by the Romans. This census that Joseph and Mary are traveling to Bethlehem for is all to bring in more taxes for the Emperor. Impoverished and oppressed folk like Mary and Joseph, those powerless to do anything, are seemingly hopeless. The religious elite and the wealthy in society are worshiped and praised, focused on their place and casting little if any attention to the needs of the lowly. In fact, so dark is this world into which Jesus enters that those perpetuating injustices don’t even see what they’re doing or not doing as injustice, as adding to the darkness. Those on the receiving end of said injustices, while they may have had hope for change and for “a light to shine in the darkness” at some point, they didn’t know when or even if it would ever come, making holding onto hope all that much harder.

Enter then Isaiah with our reading for today, where we have a proclamation of “a light shining in the darkness” followed by a prediction of “a small child.” Notice, though, the language used in these predictions. “You [God] have multiplied the nation, you have increased

its joy.” “A child has been born *for us*, a son *given to us*.” The tools of the oppressors “you have broken as on the day of Midian.” In all of these praises, it is God who is doing these things. It is God who is causing this light to shine in the darkness, a darkness that, as I’ve pointed out, is in fact manmade. The subsequent verses immediately flip from these glorious predictions and praises to oracles against the nations of Israel and Judah, predictions of God’s wrath against their sinfulness, greed, pride, etc. However, despite Isaiah’s harsh accusations that it is us, the people, who make this darkness for each other, who are the oppressors and trampling warriors mentioned, the greater truth still lies in today’s reading. Despite this manmade darkness, despite our having proven time and again down the centuries that we are not worthy of any level of grace from God, They nonetheless give us the greatest gift of all: a light that breaks through the darkness, that fills all hearts with joy, that replaces hate with love and implants peace where once there was only chaos. That light, that gracious “gift divine” that we could never earn, even if we tried, is nonetheless given, fulfilled, and embodied by the Christ child whose arrival we celebrate today. However, this gift is not a “once and done” gift.

Today, we gather as the unified body of Christ to recognize this light shining in the darkness, the glorious gift of the Christ child. In so doing, we, the body of Christ in the modern day, gather to celebrate the arrival of “this light shining in the darkness,” embodied in the child born of Mary. On us, as much as on them also, has this light shown, and in us is born renewed hopefulness and peace. However, just as Jesus was a light, a beacon of hope to a darkened world, so too are we as his followers called to do much the same. As humanity has created darkness time and again for one another, so too are we empowered to also “turn on the light,” to create that light, for others, that all humanity might know the peace, hope, love, and joy so graciously given to us by God and that all might bask in its light forever. Thus, we are called to continue to radiate that light outwards that it might shine on all God’s creation once more, filling all of Creation with joy, hope, peace, and love. So, I ask: How are you all “turning on the light” this holiday season?