

## **Darkness Into Light**

By Scott Runyon

First Baptist Church Birmingham

Dec 24, 2019

### **Welcome**

Merry Christmas! Welcome to a celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Christ. Through Advent, we have celebrated the hope, joy, kindness and generosity of our God and considered how we might follow in that pattern in our own lives.

Today we acknowledge God's presence in our midst and find ourself enfolded in God's love.

Our Creator, the living God, loved us so much that God sent the only son to live among us as one of us. We are no longer alone. God has joined us here to walk alongside us, and provide for us the light that will show us way to live fully, just as God intended from the beginning of all creation.

It was in the beginning that God made all the world out of nothing in the darkness. It says in the first chapter of the first book of the Hebrew scriptures that 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 called the light day, and the darkness he*

*called night. bAnd there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

All of creation was bathed in light from the beginning as a foreshadowing of another day many generations later, when a special baby was born into the world. Today we celebrate that day when light came into the world as a person, as a fragile human baby named Jesus.

Listen this Christmas Eve to the story of God's light that has come to us in the darkness.

### **Opening Prayer**

God, today we celebrate you and the gift of your presence with us in your son Jesus — born a baby in the typical human way, but in extraordinary circumstances. Thank you for loving us enough to make your home among us. Encircle us today in the light of your presence in this dark world. Enable us to be the people you desire us to be. Amen!

### **Exodus 13:21**

The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.

## **Reflection**

Christmas comes to us in the darkest time of the year. Through the darkest season on the year, we need a source of light to find our way. Otherwise we stumble and fall, and get more and more lost. Without light, we lack direction and purpose. Without light we are alone.

The Hebrew people were lost and alone in the desert and in need of light to guide them. God provided for them a pillar of light during the dark times of night in order that they would know God was with them and would never leave them.

We face darkness in our lives too. This darkness may be the result of the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, fighting and tension among friends or family, or any variety of circumstances.

You may have also found yourself in darkness when identifying with those who have been impacted by natural disasters like earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, mudslides, or hurricanes. Or perhaps you have found yourself in darkness when identifying with asylum seekers and refugees who have fled the only place they have known as home in order to be safe and simply survive.

Maybe you have experienced darkness while watching the impeachment trials in Congress this past month.

We live in dark times, and there will be darkness in our future.

But thanks be to God who has provided for us light in this darkness. If we stop to notice, we will find light growing out of the midnight darkness.

## **Ezra 9:8**

But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery.

## **Reflection**

The Hebrew people lived for generations in slavery in Babylon, away from their homes and their place of worship. Here they languished, wondering if God had abandoned them, and at times wondered if God even existed.

But God was with them, providing light through various prophets like Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah and others. These prophets helped them to hold onto the hope that God would yet give them light in what seemed like total darkness,

and bring them out of the darkness and into a new day for their people.

They needed to stand in the hope of a new day — a new day when light will reign.

As the story goes on, God indeed led them back home and into a new day like the hope of a flower blooming in the spring.

### **Psalm 27:1**

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?

### **Reflection**

Fear is something that grips us in uncertain times — times when it seems we are surrounded by darkness. Fear threatens to constrict our energy, obscure our vision and focus, and steal our lifeblood, leaving us frozen.

But with God's light, we can hold onto hope even in the darkness and experience fear dissolve. With God's light we are offered the hope of salvation from fear and death. With light, we are offered a space in which we can move and regain our place in the world.

With God's light, we need not ever be afraid again. Our lives are made

anew in God's holy light, that began with a holy night.

### **1 Peter 2:9**

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

### **Reflection**

God tells us the good news through Peter that we are so much more than we realize. We are in reality God's people! God's family!

What does it mean that we are God's family? It means that we are royalty, of the most holy royal lineage. But this isn't by virtue of what family we were born into. Instead, it has everything to do with God simply and profoundly choosing us. We inherit this place in God's family because God chose us, adopted us.

When we fully get this reality, most of us may honestly be overwhelmed and fall facedown in humility in the face of the distinct privilege and honor it is to be chosen in this way — plucked out of darkness and brought into God's light!

## **Luke 2:8-21**

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words

and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

## **Reflection** “Darkness Into Light”

In this, the most famous passage about the birth of Jesus, we read of light encircling an angel proclaiming the birth to some shepherds in a field. Then a bunch more angels called a “heavenly host” join the first angel and begin praising God. It seemed that this all happened at night, but the whole company of shepherds were engulfed in a radiant light so bright that it had them all terrified. This wasn’t normal!

This was the common birth of a baby, but it was anything but typical or normal. Heaven had split open and God’s radiating love and grace was showering into our world, obliterating the darkness in such a way that it was overwhelming for those who were there to witness it.

The reality of God's presence coming into our world is both common and extraordinary.

The birth was common in that I am sure Mary felt pain in childbirth, going through what any other woman went through in labor and delivery. There may have actually been a bit more discomfort considering the accommodations, which were somewhat non-traditional being in a cattle stall.

The message of Jesus' birth was extraordinary and radical in that God was bringing into our lives, in physical form, a demonstration of love for us unlike it had ever been done before or since. This unique event bound God's love to our human experience in all of the every day places.

The angels declared this event as "good news of great joy for all the people!"

It continues to be good news for us today, as an event about which we can declare great joy has come for all people!

God has radiated love into our lives and we will never be the same.

That good news of great joy can give new depth to the phrase everyone hears this time of year.

May "Merry Christmas!" find you digging deep and rejoicing about the radiant love God has showered on you and all people.

Merry Christmas!

### **John 8:12**

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

### **Reflection**

Jesus is the light of this world, and this reality holds a promise that we never need to walk in darkness because we carry God's light with us.

Since God chose us to be included in the family, we also have a responsibility to carry God's light into all the world — to be light bearers, ambassadors of God's radiant glory, representing God to our neighbors and friends and to the world.

We must carry this light with humility reflective of how Jesus was born as a fragile infant baby.

Today, let us celebrate the mystery of this light that has come to us in the person of Jesus, the Christ, who desires to have a relationship with each of us, and also together with us as a community.

## **Closing Blessing**

### **NOW THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS**

By Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is  
stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are  
home,  
When the shepherds are back with  
their flocks,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.

Go now in peace.

Merry Christmas!