

**Advent 2010**  
**Silent Night! Holy Night!**  
**"Love's Pure Light"**  
**Jesus Incarnate...**  
...Dispersing the Darkness

*Text: John 1:1-14*

Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth. (TLH 646)

Dear Fellow Recipients of the gift of the Light of the World:

Are you afraid of the dark? Do you know anyone who is afraid of the dark?  
The answer is no, but this will probably take a bit of explanation.

This Advent season we are exploring three great truths gleaned from Scripture concerning the birth of our Savior Jesus and sung each year in the verses of "Silent Night." Last week, as you may recall, we talked about fear – in particular the fear that all sinful human beings experience when they find themselves in the presence of true holiness. Jesus came to earth to dispel that fear, and he did so by allowing us to stand holy and uncondemned in the presence of our God – something that is only possible because Jesus' perfection is now ours through faith.

We also noted last week that there are many different types of fear, but what we did not discuss was the fact that most "fears" are misnamed. "Fear of guns," for example, is not really a fear of the gun itself but a fear of what bodily harm that weapon, or the person *using* that gun, could inflict. "Fear of heights" is actually fear of what would happen if you were to return to the surface of the earth at 32 feet-per-second squared. Claustrophobia is really not so much a fear of confined spaces as it is a fear of what might happen to you if you were to be confined in (and couldn't get out of) such a space. I know of no one, for example, who cringes in fear when he simply sees a gun, drives past a TV tower, or stands in front of a small closet.

To this end I would also submit that neither you nor I have ever met anyone who was actually afraid of the dark. What folks really mean when they say that is that they fear the unknown, or that they fear what the darkness is hiding and which threatens them, again, with some sort of pain or bodily harm.

While this may seem like a small and insignificant distinction, it will actually help us to gain insight into both the theme for this evening's meditation and our text. That text is found in the Gospel of John, the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 1:1-14** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup> ¶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. <sup>9</sup> ¶ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> ¶ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

These are the very words of God – words that God gave us to clear away the darkness that plagued each of us from birth and to reveal the reality that is now ours. That our God would so bless us this evening, so we pray, **"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

As a child my bedroom was in the cellar of my parent's home. (We actually called it a "basement," but "cellar" sounds more ominous.) I remember as a child being "afraid of the dark." Not always, but often enough. I also remember the mixture of relief and chagrin when morning came and with it the realization that, unless our house was inhabited at night by incredibly lazy or apathetic "bad guys" who simply failed to carry out their diabolical intentions on a nightly basis, I was actually afraid of nothing. No bogeymen lurked. My remedy, by the way, was to force myself to walk in the dark to the spookiest recess of the "cellar" – where evil creatures were most likely to lie in wait – and to sit or stand in that spot until convinced that no evil thing loitered and until I was therefore no longer afraid.

The point here is that obviously since no one has ever been injured by darkness itself – rather by that which was concealed by or in the darkness – it is therefore safe to say that "afraid of the dark" is a misnomer. It doesn't really mean what it says. It's an easy mistake to make, by the way, especially since simply turning on a light tends to make both the darkness and the fear disappear. The fact remains that the darkness isn't the problem, but that which it conceals.

Carry this forward and apply it to our text and to this evening's theme: *Jesus came to earth to dispel the darkness.*

Ever since the fall into sin, every single human being is born into utter and impenetrable spiritual darkness. As such we are born also with fear – a natural fear of that which is concealed by that darkness. Human beings are born not only with a natural knowledge of God but, because of our conscience, also with a natural knowledge and fear of evil.

The problem, of course, is that our natural darkness prevents us from accurately identifying either good or evil. We know that God exists, but we can't see him. We know that evil exists, but neither can we *accurately* identify that. The real problem comes when we listen to those who claim some sort of natural knowledge or understanding of just what's out there in the darkness – both as to what is good and what is evil. To this end you may recall the words of one of Job's misguided "comforters": ***"The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. <sup>21</sup> Dreadful sounds are in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him. <sup>22</sup> He does not believe that he will return out of darkness, and he is marked for the sword. <sup>23</sup> He wanders abroad for bread, saying, 'Where is it?' He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand; <sup>24</sup> distress and anguish terrify him; they prevail against him, like a king ready for battle. <sup>25</sup> Because he has stretched out his hand against God and defies the Almighty, <sup>26</sup> running stubbornly against him with a thickly bossed shield."*** Job 15:20-26

The problem, of course, was that Job's counselor was very familiar with the spiritual darkness that is common to all mankind, yet he also believed that he knew more – that he could not only rescue himself from the darkness but guide others as well.

In fact here is a much more honest appraisal from the Book of Lamentations of the natural darkness that envelopes sinful mankind: ***"I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; <sup>2</sup> he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; <sup>3</sup> surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long. <sup>4</sup>***

***He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; he has broken my bones; <sup>5</sup> he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; <sup>6</sup> he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. <sup>7</sup> He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has made my chains heavy; <sup>8</sup> though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; <sup>9</sup> he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones; he has made my paths crooked."*** Lamentations 3:1-9

The real tragedy in all of this is that mankind, unable to find any path out of the darkness on his own, taught himself to make friends with the darkness. We did so by convincing ourselves that we actually know what is out there and that we could somehow make friends with that which threatens us.

One of the most chilling scenes I have ever witnessed in a movie was of a woman trapped in utter darkness in a cellar with a maniacal serial killer. Part of what made the scenario so terrifying was the fact that the homicidal maniac had night-vision equipment that enabled him to see everything the woman did, while she could see absolutely nothing of her mortal enemy.

That's the sort of existence into which you and I were born. Our darkness held terrors that we could neither see nor comprehend, but who could, nonetheless, observe our every move. More frightening still was the fact that in our blindness and ignorance we came to the incredible conclusion that the evil entities that surrounded us were actually our friends and allies.

It is into that dark and terrible world that the light of Jesus Christ burst forth on Christmas Day. In Matthew 4:16 we read: ***"The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."*** This is the event – the illumination – foretold by Isaiah when he wrote: ***"I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground."*** Isaiah 42:16

This is also the basic theme of our text for this evening. All Scripture teaches us that far from an unwarranted and irrational fear, mankind was right to be terrified of that which lurked menacingly in the darkness of our unbelief. Yet when Jesus burst on the scene, the darkness had no choice but to flee. Our text gave us the good news: ***"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*** Yet while the forces of evil could never stand before this exposing light,

countless human beings also fled from this perfect, holy illumination and chose to remain in the darkness of their sin and unbelief. In his Gospel, John described the inconceivable rejection of the Light: ***"Whoever believes in (the Son of God) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."*** John 3:18-21

Thanks be to God that you and I stand this very moment in the light that is Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter described also you and me when he said, ***"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*** 1 Peter 2:9-10

This is why this time of year is so special to us. This is why Christians decorate our homes and trees with lights and candles. By his coming Jesus has not only opened our eyes to see the enemies that really were hidden by the darkness that had enveloped us, he has also granted us the gifts of faith and understanding. The result, in the words of our text, is that he has also ***"given us the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*** This is why we celebrate. Jesus Christ has driven the darkness of unbelief from our hearts, forever. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

### December 15

**John 3:16-21** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

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**Midweek Advent Services – 2010**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board)*

## The Order of the Confessional Service *(Red Hymnal page 46)*

**Pastor:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost

**Congregation:** (Sung) **Amen.**

**Pastor:** Make haste, O God, to deliver me.

**Congregation:** (Sung) **Make haste to help me, O Lord.**

**Pastor:** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

**Congregation:** (Sung) **A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost**

**As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be; world without end.**

**Amen.**

## The Advent Psalm *(Psalm 30)*

(Antiphon) **At the works of Your hands, O Lord, I lift up my voice in song; I sing for joy.**

**Sing to the Lord you \ saints of His;**

**Praise His \ holy Name.**

**For His anger lasts only a \ moment,**

**But His favor lasts a \ lifetime.**

**Weeping may remain \ for a night,**

**But rejoicing comes in the \ morning.**

(Antiphon)

**To you, O \ Lord I called;**

**To the Lord I cried for \ mercy;**

**Hear, O Lord, and be merci- \ ful to me.**

**O Lord, \ be my help.**

**You turned my wailing into \ dancing.**

**That my heart may sing to You and not be \ silent.**

**Glory be to the Father and \ to the Son**

**And to the Holy \ Spirit.**

**As it was in the be - \ ginning,**

**Is now, and will be forever. \ Amen.**

(Antiphon)

## The Scripture Reading for the Day

## The Confession of Sins *(Red Hymnal page 47)*

**All:** O almighty God, merciful Father, I confess to You that I am a sinner. I have sinned in my thoughts, words, and actions. I acknowledge therefore that I deserve only hard times on earth, and eternal punishment in hell. But I am sorry for my sins, and I ask you to forgive me, not because I have earned Your forgiveness, but because of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, Who has paid my debt in full.

## The Absolution

**Pastor:** Upon this your confession, I, according to the command and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Himself, announce grace and forgiveness unto all of you; and assure you of the Lord's own decree that all of your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Congregation:** (Sung) **Amen.**

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board)*

## The Sermon Theme – Silent Night! Holy Night!

**Jesus Incarnate...**

Dec. 1: Descending From Heaven "Round yon Virgin" *(Isaiah 7:14)*

Dec. 8: Dispelling Man's Fear "Shepherds Quake" *(Luke 2:9-11)*

Dec. 15: Dispersing the Darkness "Love's Pure Light" *(John 1:1-14)*

## The Offertory – [Sung by All]

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit. Amen.

## The Post Sermon Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board)*

## The Offering

## The Collect *(Red Hymnal page 49)*

**Pastor:** *(Following the reading of the Collect) The Lord will give strength unto His people.*

**Congregation:** **The Lord will bless His people with peace.**

**Pastor:** O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, give unto Your servants that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be prepared to obey Your commandments, and also that we, being defended by You from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness. This we ask through the merits of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**Congregation:** (Sung) **Amen.**

## The Prayers of the Day

### The Lord's Prayer

### The Benediction *(Spoken by the Pastor)*

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

**Congregation:** *(Sung)* **Amen.**

### The Closing Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board)*

### Silent Prayer

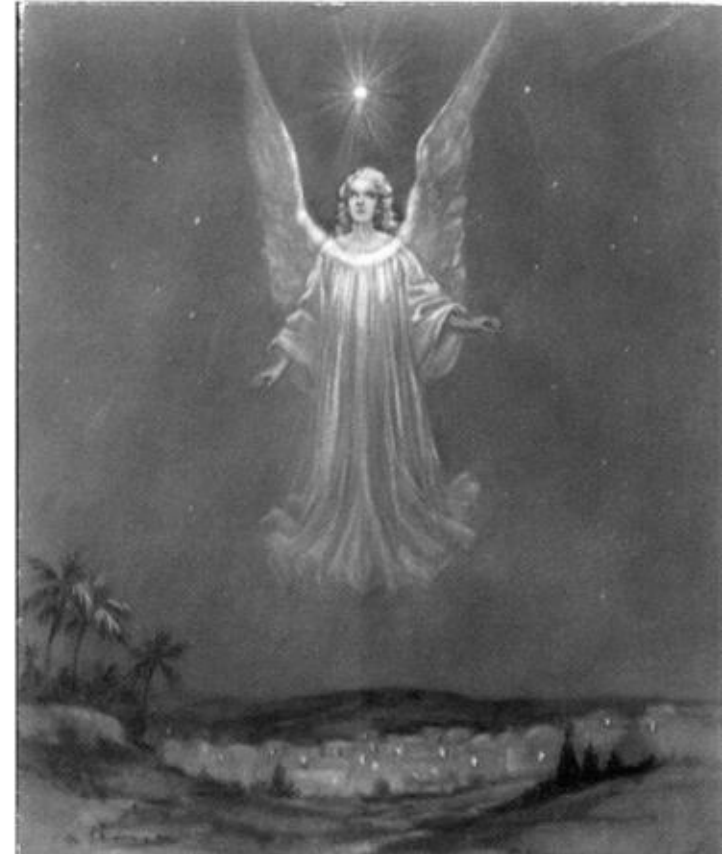
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### Sermon Texts:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:9-11** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 1:1-14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup> ¶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. <sup>9</sup> ¶ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> ¶ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.



“SILENT NIGHT! HOLY NIGHT!”

JESUS INCARNATE

St. Paul Lutheran Church