

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS**Isaiah 9:1-4, Psalm 43, John 1:1-13****As we begin, I'm going to pray the powerful words of Keith Getty's powerful prayer hymn:**

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
 To receive the food of Your Holy Word.
 Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
 Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
 In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
 Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
 All Your purposes for Your glory.
 Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
 Holy reverence, true humility;
 Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.
 Cause our faith to rise; cause our eyes to see
 Your majestic love and authority.
 Words of pow'r that can never fail—
 Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
 Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
 Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us—
 Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
 That will echo down through eternity.
 And by grace we'll stand on Your promises,
 And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us.
 Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.
 Amen!

Intro: We all know what happens on December 25th. It is, of course, Christmas Day! It's what makes the most wonderful time of the year wonderful, right? Well, we know better than that. We know that *Jesus* makes this the most wonderful time of year. Truthfully the most wonderful day of the year isn't Christmas, but Easter Day when we celebrate Jesus's victory over sin and death with his resurrection.

Let me just say, I really like December 22nd, and I don't like June 22nd nearly as much. Any idea as to the reason why? (**Give time for answers from the congregation**)

Yes! December 22nd is the day after the shortest day of the year. The days get longer starting on December 22nd.

I'm really affected by light – or lack of it. When it's dark and gloomy as winter looms, especially for extended periods of time, I start feeling dark and gloomy too. It is for that reason June 22nd is not my favorite day because I know from that day forward the days will start getting shorter until these December days in Northern Ohio arrive with daylight hours that don't fully dawn until about 8 AM if we're lucky and are snuffed out by 5 PM. Add to that the prevalent winter cloudiness and my spirits can take a nosedive. It's no wonder that the holidays can be difficult for people who are alone or struggle with loneliness. All to say, increasing light does everyone a world of good.

For that reason I want to talk today about the Light of the World who is light in the darkness, and also, how we must be light in the darkness.

First, a word about Saint Lucia – the saint who is celebrated tomorrow on December 13. Your insert for today calls her Lucia of Syracuse, Child of Light, and gives a brief yet enlightening (pun intended) picture into her life. It was a tragic and short life – but a life where she lived out her conviction to be a picture of Jesus by caring for others who were in hiding because of the heavy persecution of Christ Followers in her day. As you can see in the illustration, she was the designer of the original head lamp as she, a great risk, when out in the

dark and into the dungeons, tombs and catacombs to care for the needy. She took the light of Christ to her world. And so should we.

It's an understatement to say light is important. Light is essential for life. Jesus came to be the light of life. Isaiah talks about it in one of our texts for today. Listen (**Read Isaiah 9:1-4**)

There WILL be no more gloom for those who were in distress

- Gloom is gone because darkness cannot stand up to the light. What words of promise! And it's good because the final words of the previous chapter are decidedly less encouraging, Just listen, *And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.* Isaiah 8:22. The judgement on the disobedient people of God is relentless, but the promise coming out of that judgement is for deliverance. It begins gloriously with a promise of light in the darkness and a dawn to drive out the gloom. So no matter what the calendar says about how many hours of daylight we have, we have the promise of light in the darkness. This wonderful season of the year is wonderful because light came into a dark world. And that light still illuminates our increasingly dark world. We need to light up the world and bring the light of Christ to dark places – but I get ahead of myself. . . . For more light, let's look at a scripture we will return to for the next two Sundays as well. (**Read John 1:1-13**)

True life is always light

- F. B. Meyer words, "*As speech reveals hidden thoughts of men, so does our Lord utter the unseen God. God spake and it was done. His words preceded the act of creation, but Christ was the Word or utterance of God. He who created time preceded time, and that which is before time is eternal and divine. Christ is the organ or medium by which God goes forth in creation, providence, and redemption. The life of God was stored in the human nature of Jesus, when the word became flesh, that it might more readily pass into us. True life is always light. When we receive Christ's life, we shine.*" It's like this, in the same way that I don't really know what you are thinking until you speak, Jesus is the Word of God, and he is the one that put into words God's thinking for the deliverance of humanity. That is how Jesus is the Word.
- Not only did he put into words God's redemptive plan for eternal life, he gave it illumination by being the light. Isaiah prophesied to *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.* Isaiah 9:2 (NIV) and now it was reality. The light had come.
- The light revealed God and illuminated men during the Old Testament, and John points out that the light was always in the world he had made; he was always illuminating humanity; yet, because of the hostile darkness and the sin of humanity, the world did not recognize the light and acknowledge its obligation to him. Darkness was rejection. But Jesus came to overcome rejection.
- And the light is not just for some, but *for all mankind* (John 1:3). Brent Kercheville points out that "*Everyone has opportunity to be enlightened by the light. The light did not shine to just a few. The light shines to the whole world. The light is not limited. This is true about light. It is not possible to turn on the light in this room just for me and it not shine for you also.*" So the light much more than shines. Floyd Filson writes that Jesus "*enlightened the spirit, mind, and heart of every man.*" The life that is offered is for whosoever will receive it. In John 1:9-13 there is a hint of this thought of the light and word becoming flesh, but in verse 14, which I did not read earlier he comes right out and says it. Listen, *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.* John 1:14 (ESV).

Darkness has been overcome

- Without Jesus, we are dead and in darkness. We are lost. It's no wonder then that humanity has a congenital fear of both death and darkness. Part of it is reasonable – after all, when you cannot see in the darkness you can run into obstacles or trip over unknown hazards. You also don't know what lurks in the darkness – real or imagined. We fear what we can't see.
- Light is ALWAYS better. There is life in the light. Plants will not thrive with no light. Creatures can't thrive in the dark. Light is life and life is light. F. F. Bruce writes, "*In the first creation, 'darkness was upon the face of the deep' (Genesis 1:2) until God called light into being, so the new creation involves the banishing of spiritual darkness by the light which shines in the Word.*" It began at the very beginning – God began driving the darkness out at the literal dawn of Creation; it continued with his deliverance from

the fallenness of humanity we talked about last week. Jesus came to humanity – his very name means “Salvation”. Darkness has been overcome. Jesus came at Christmas to bring light to the darkness.

Conclusion: A bit ago read a quote from F. B. Meyer that ended with, “*When we receive Christ's life, we shine.*” We also heard about Saint Lucia who ministered to the poor and the oppressed by going into the night or the darkness of their hiding places with her way illuminated by a wreath of candles on her head. And your insert referencing Lucia ends with the question, “*How can we, like Saint Lucia, carry the light into dark places?*”. In other words, are we shining with the Gospel message of the light of the world who stepped into darkness? Are we light in the darkness? Do we shine with the joy, peace, hope, and satisfaction of knowing that in Jesus we have been received as children of God?

You see, such a message gives a glow to Christ Followers. Are you shining in the darkness with the light that can only come from the one who overcame the darkness? I pray you are.

Here is something else to ponder – it’s from Madeleine L'Engle: “*We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.*” Be that light! Amen.