

“Digging out the Lights!”—Isaiah 9:1-2

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Digging out the Lights!”, is Isaiah 9:1-2 → *But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time He brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time He has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.*

This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

With the arrival of the Advent season in the Church Year Calendar we begin to look ahead to the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ—for centuries referred to as Christmas. While many people may look at this time of year with much trepidation and fear, many may view it with much expectation and joy. For many people this expectation is realized when they dig out the lights and decorate their homes.

Light has been associated with what we refer to as Advent and Christmas ever since the incarnation took place when God took on human flesh in the birth of a baby in Bethlehem Who was named Jesus. It’s almost as if God “dug out the lights” in the events connected to His

birth in the brightness of God's glory when the angel appeared to the shepherds to announce His birth, as well as the shining of the star which the Magi followed to meet Jesus. Light played an important part in revealing to us He Who is the *great light* shining in the *deep darkness* of sin in our world. Even with the challenges connected with the coming of Jesus at His birth it was still the cause of great joy for many.

As we dig out the decorative lights during this time of year it can be a joyful experience in our expectation of the celebration of Christmas. These lights can be a reminder to us of the meaning of our Advent and Christmas celebrations—**our Savior has come to give us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.**

Yet, for many the feeling that this time of year gives is reflected in numerous way, not necessarily connected to the birth of the Christ. From a worldly perspective Christmas becomes a “feel good” season packed with all kinds “feel good” activities like sentimental Christmas specials, special giving to charities of all kinds, parties and the like. It seems like people start digging out the lights earlier and earlier every year, maybe because it feels better to put them up in warmth rather than the below zero weather. Planning for next Christmas' gift-giving can begin immediately in January. Some of you may remember the push to open up a Christmas Club account at a bank in an effort to be prepared for the financial on-slot coming up in eleven months. In fact, there are many

who believe that the retail industry is digging out the lights too far in advance to capitalize on the holiday sales.

Yet, even amidst the “feel good” traditions connected with the season, there are ways that we can grow spiritually in our celebrations. Taking time for special worship focusing on the impact of Christ’s birth for our lives, as we are doing this evening, keeps us focused on Jesus, *the Light of the world* (cf. John 8:12). When we make special gifts to various charities and show acts of kindness to those in need we do so in an effort to show and share **the love of Christ** with others. Some make extra efforts to focus on Jesus by special Advent devotions many times involving lighting candles on an Advent wreath.

Connecting light to Christmas didn’t start with the invention of the light bulb, the discovery of electricity or other Christmas traditions. It has its roots in Old Testament prophecy as expressed in verse 2 of our text: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.* What makes the *light* referred to in this verse so *great*? Isn’t any light that shines “great” in comparison to *deep darkness*?

What makes the light *great* is the fact that Jesus appeared in a world darkened by sin in our lives—both the original sin in our hearts and the sins we commit when we disobey God’s Word. The life of an unbeliever is described in Scripture many times as living in darkness. Ephesians

4:18-19 describes them this way: *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.* It is deep spiritual darkness indeed.

What also makes the light *great* is the fact that Jesus appeared as God in the flesh to deliver us from **remaining in** the *deep darkness* of sin. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says: *For God, Who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God **in the face of Jesus Christ**.* God intervened into our sin-darkened world in Christ, Who dealt with sin, death and the devil once and for all people, so that we can experience the glory of God. Through the Word and Sacraments the Holy Spirit breaks into our sin-darkened hearts so that we trust completely in the Person & Work of Jesus for us and experience God's glory for eternity. This is the impact behind the words of "Silent Night, Holy Night" when we sing: "Radiant beams from Thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace" (LSB 363:3), at Jesus' coming.

So, what message are we striving to convey by our public display of the lights we dig out and put up during the Christmas season? Just as we want all people to see the Christmas lights we display so the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God wants this *great light* (i.e. Jesus) to be visible

to all *nations*. He wants everyone to be brought out of their *gloom* and *anguish* through faith in Jesus.

This was a message of hope to God's people in Isaiah's day. Many were living in *gloom* and *anguish*, the *deep darkness* of unforgiven sin. Why? Because they became mis-focused in the midst of the LORD's material blessings and affluence. They eventually turned away from the LORD, disobeying His commands and thus rejecting Him as their Lord and Savior by their behavior. They brought the LORD's discipline upon themselves in His effort to get them to repent of their sins, turn back to Him and live in a proper relationship with Him by following His Will for their daily living.

This is the same message of hope for people today, especially as many are mis-focused with the materialism and bad behavior which runs rampant, not just during the holidays but everyday. We need to bring the same prophetic message to others so they can see that they don't have to live in the *gloom* and *anguish* which displays itself too easily during this season.

No matter what appearances may convey, Jesus is still the Lord over all that is taking place and only He can truly give the peace which is hailed so highly during this season. Jesus said in John 14:27 → *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.* His

peace is described in Philippians 4:7 as *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, and which will guard our hearts and . . . minds in Christ Jesus*. The true “peace on earth” is that which comes through repentance and faith in Christ alone and, being *justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. Romans 5:1).

Thus, the Light of Christ is not a light that shines on the outside in the darkness and then fades away when the daylight comes. It shines in our hearts as we trust God’s Word of promise from the Old Testament. 2 Peter 1:19 says: *We have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*. Therefore, this Light of Christ is not based on a fleeting feeling of joy at Christmas time but endures in our hearts and shows in our lives **at all times**.

God’s prophetic word is old but it still shines forth to point us to Christ today, bright as ever. Our Christmas lights may be old, the decorations may be old, the traditions reach far back into the past. But as we dig out the lights it reminds us of the spiritual digging that took place at the time of Jesus’ birth and still needs to be done today.

Remember what happened when the Magi inquired of Herod concerning the birth of Jesus? Matthew 2:4-5 says: *Assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, Herod inquired of them where*

the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea as it had been written by the prophet Micah. The chief priests and scribes of the people dug into God's Word for confirmation of the information about Jesus' birth presented by the Magi. The search for Christ always takes us to the written Word of God.

Digging out the lights should remind us of our need to dig out the Bible everyday. As we dig into God's Word **daily** we'll be enlightened by the Holy Spirit and actually experience the joy of Christmas all through the year. Why? Because we will encounter Jesus Christ, the great Light Who enlightens our sinful hearts with His love and forgiveness daily. Amen.

Jesus said in John 8:12 →

I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness,

but will have the light of life.

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.