

# Darkness and Light

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Olentangy Christian Reformed Church  
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## **Isaiah 60:1-3 (NRSV)**

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

## **John 1:1-5, 9-14**

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Everything came to be through him. Not one thing that has come to be came to be without him.

In him was life. The life was people's light. The light shines in the darkness. The darkness did not overcome it.

The true light, which enlightens all people, was coming into the world. It was in the world. The world came to be through it. The world did not know.

He came to his own. His own people did not receive him. To all who did receive him, to those who had faith in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not by blood, not by the will of the flesh, not by the will of a man, but by God.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We saw his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

## **Children's Story**

Do you have any bedtime rituals? I mean certain things you do most nights when you go to bed. Like having a snack, brushing your teeth, reading a story, saying your prayers, and so on.

Well, Molly Muggeridge and her mom have a ritual they go through every night when Molly goes to bed. After Molly says her prayers and her mom tucks her in, Molly says, "Mom, please turn on the night light."

"Why do you want me to turn the night light on?" her mom asks.

"So I won't be afraid," answers Molly.

"Afraid of what?" asks her mom.

"Afraid of the dark," answers Molly.

"What's there to be afraid of in the dark?" asks her mom.

"Monsters!" answers Molly. She doesn't even have to think about it.

"Monsters?" asks her mom. "From where?"

"From behind my dresser," answers Molly, "and from way under my bed."

"Okay," says her mom, "I'll put on the night light."

"Thank you," says Molly. And she means it.

"But Molly," says her mom, "you know that the night light doesn't shine behind your dresser, and it doesn't shine way under your bed. Aren't you afraid of monsters still hiding there?"

“Oh, no, mom,” Molly answers. She’s thought about this for a long time. “I’m not afraid if the monsters hide in the dark places. I just don’t want them coming near me in my bed. When the night light is on, I’m safe. Because the monsters can’t get near me without coming into the light. And monsters are afraid of the light.”

“You know, Molly,” says her mom, “I think you’re right. Good night.”

### **Sermon**

A parent trying to help a scared child get to sleep might say, “Nothing’s there in the dark that isn’t there in the light.” But that’s not true. Close the blinds, turn off the light, shut the door, and darkness enters the room. Darkness is not there in the light, but it’s there in the dark. And it’s very real.

Yet it only takes a small light, a nightlight, to drive the darkness out. Not enough light to read *The Cat in the Hat* by. But enough light to rest by, without anxiety or great fear. Enough light to sleep in peace. “The light shines in the darkness. The darkness did not overcome it.”

**Isaiah 60 is a message to Israel shrouded in darkness.** Israel had known light, a singular light. A light that lit up a cherished past. A light that shined rays of hope into the future. The light of the glorious presence of the LORD. But the light had gone out. Babylon had snuffed the wick, and Israel could not re-light it. They had returned from exile, but they were alone and in darkness. The glory had departed — that’s what the prophet Ezekiel had seen — the glory had departed, and it showed no sign of coming back.

They could smell the darkness. They could touch it. They could taste it. The walls were broken down. The streets were littered with refuse. The vineyards were uprooted and fruitless. Jerusalem was a city without light, and a city without light is no city at all.

Hope had dried up. The people sat in darkness, waiting for a great light. But even a little light would do. Not enough light to draw building plans by. But enough light to rest by, and to be at peace.

**Today we have plenty of lights, especially in our cities, but it can be awfully dark.** Of course, real darkness is a scarce commodity, especially near cities. Light pollution is the bane of stargazers everywhere.

But on Christmas Eve — of all times! — on Christmas Eve, darkness descended on a small community outside Seattle, Washington. Six members of one family, including a six year old girl and a three year old boy, were brutally murdered. The sheriff’s department called it an act of “pure evil.”

Three days later, at a crowded political rally, former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated. Done in by bullets or by a bomb or by a sun roof or by whatever the explanation is today. Violence erupted in the aftermath of the assassination. And darkness grew thicker over Pakistan.

For victims, for families, for friends, for citizens, dreadful lights have been shining in the darkness. Emergency lights and news camera lights have pierced the blackness. But darkness remains. For all the brightness, there’s no real light. No real light to reach into the depths of despair, of confusion, of fear, of meaninglessness.

When the prophet Elijah despaired over the power of Jezebel and over the fate he was sure awaited himself, he needed to hear from God. But God was not heard in the roaring wind. God was not heard in the rumbling earthquake. God was not heard in the crackling fire. Instead God spoke in a still, small voice. And the prophet heard.

Perhaps what we need in deep darkness is not a bright, blazing spotlight, but a nightlight or a flickering candle. Not enough light to drive every shadow away. But enough light to rest by, and to be at peace.

**Isaiah 60 lights a candle in the darkness.** The glory of the LORD shall return. The light of God’s presence shall burn again in Israel. For Israel, for Jerusalem, a new day shall dawn when the first dim

rays of the approaching Sun sneak over the edge of the horizon. Not enough light to rebuild an empire by. But enough light to rest by, without anxiety about the future, because the Sun will rise fully. And this dawning light shall reach beyond Israel, says the prophet. It shall reach beyond Jerusalem. All nations, all peoples shall see and be drawn to this light.

Isaiah 60 looked ahead to a new, unimagined visit of God's glory to Jerusalem. This visit would be made by Jesus Christ. In him, the glory of the Father would be seen. In him, light would shine, light beyond the power of darkness to overcome.

And so we celebrated last week. Because in Jesus Christ the light of God's new day has dawned on Israel and on all nations. God has begun reclaiming and redeeming the whole creation. No, darkness isn't obliterated, not yet, not by a longshot. And the first light of dawn itself can cast long shadows. But even in the shadows, there is light. Not enough light to erase every trace of darkness. But enough light to rest by, without overwhelming anxiety or fear.

**And the light does shine in the darkness.** It wasn't until the day after Christmas that the six victims outside Seattle were discovered. That's when shock gripped and began to overwhelm the small town of Carnation, Washington. The next day, Thursday, the Tolt Congregational Church opened its chapel for all who wanted to pray. It was two days after Christmas. I'm sure a Christ Candle was burning in that sanctuary. A light shining in the darkness. Not enough light to make sense of it all. Not enough light to erase all the dark shadows of fear and confusion. But enough light to rest by, at least for a little while. Enough light to give a measure of peace so near to a scene of terror.

"Nothing's there in the dark that isn't there in the light." That's what parents sometimes say. But it's not true. In the dark, there is unrelieved darkness. But turn on a nightlight, or light a candle, and the darkness is gone. Yes, shadows remain. And light does not illumine every dark corner of the bedroom. But there's enough light for a child to rest by, and to sleep in peace.

Just so the light of Jesus Christ — whose coming we have celebrated — the light of Jesus Christ breaks the darkness and shines to all people, to all nations. The light of Christ doesn't drive away every shadow — shadows of doubt or of death or of disaster. But it gives enough light for the children of God to rest by, without overwhelming anxiety or fear.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come," says the prophet. Perhaps it's only the long, low light of dawn breaking into thick and unrelieved darkness. But that's enough. In the dark even a nightlight is enough. Enough to rest by. Enough to be at peace.