

Walking in the Light of the Lord

Isaiah 2:1-5

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One preacher told about visiting an island off the coast of Maine. The only way to get there is to ride the ferry that departs the mainland at 7:00 every morning. The ride takes about an hour. The morning he rode out to the island, the sea was smooth as glass. He had a pleasant trip, soaking in the breeze and delighting in the sense of adventure.

But coming back later that day, it was a different story. A front had moved in and the wind was howling and whipping up the waves. The preacher asked the ferry pilot, "Are we still going to go back?" He chuckled and said, "Oh yes, this is nothing."

Before long, where there had been a gorgeous sheet of glass, there were now violent, white-capped waves. Where there had been an intrepid adventurer, there was now one sea-sick preacher.

He held up fairly well for fifteen minutes or so. Then his stomach started churning and he was turning green. The pilot noticed and told him, "Sit down, find a point on the shore and focus on it."

So that's what he did. He saw far away, on the rocky shore, a point that was higher than the others, and on that point was a lighthouse. He kept his eyes on it and visualized being back on solid ground in a warm, dry place. After a while, his stomach grew calmer, his head cleared, and he began to breathe deeply. "I'm going to make it," he thought. And he did. (Stephen Montgomery, http://day1.org/2384-closer_than_you_think, accessed 11/24/10).

That reminded me of the old story about the lookout on a battleship who spies a light ahead off the starboard bow. The captain tells him to signal the other vessel. "Advise you change course 20 degrees immediately!" The answer comes back, "Advise *you* change course 20 degrees immediately!"

The captain is furious. He signals, "I am a captain. We are on a collision course. Alter *your* course 20 degrees now!" The answer comes back, "I am a seaman second class, and I strongly urge you to alter *your*

course 20 degrees.”

Now the captain is beside himself with rage. He signals. “I am a battleship!” The answer comes back, “I am a lighthouse.”

The prophet Isaiah lived in a tumultuous, choppy time. Israel and Judah were caught between aggressive world powers: Assyria and Egypt. Judah’s political and religious life was in upheaval. Unrighteousness and injustice were widespread. God called Isaiah to bring a message to the people exposing their sin, calling them to repent and giving them hope of what God would do.

In the midst of all that, Zion/Jerusalem/Temple would be a place to focus, to get bearings. The Lord’s house was immovable and secure.

Isaiah urges the people, “Walk in the light of the Lord.” Advent is the season of light, of increasing light. We begin seeing the light as if from far off and it grows brighter until “the light becomes alive” in a manger in Bethlehem.

If we’re going to walk in the Lord’s light, we need to see the light. Really, we need to see *in* the light. “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” (CSL, *Is Theology Poetry?*

<http://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/cs-lewis-quotes.htm>).

What does it mean to walk in the light of the Lord? In this passage, Israel receives the call to walk in the Lord’s light right after all the nations are envisioned coming to the Lord. So this is an invitation to all people, including God’s rebellious children, to see in God’s light, to walk in God’s light, to live all of life in God’s light.

People come to Zion, to God’s house, where God teaches them his ways so they can walk in his paths. God’s instruction or law and word go out. God judges and rules between warring nations and so instruments of war become implements of farming.

Isaiah is describing the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom is where and when people acknowledge the Lord, listen to God’s word and walk in God’s ways. Instead of learning war, they learn God’s word and ways. We are grateful for veterans who have fought for us and soldiers who are in combat now and we honor them. But at the same time we long for and

pray for and work for the day when their sacrifice and service will not be necessary.

Even now, we are called to begin living in anticipation of God's kingdom of light and peace. When we live now according to God's word and ways we begin to experience something of what God plans for the world's future.

As we seek to walk in the light of the Lord, let's understand something about that light. Here's a quick survey of God's light in the Bible.

"And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen 1:3).

"The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1).

"O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me" (Ps 43:3).

"Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path" (Ps 119:105).

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light" (Isa 9:2).

"I will also make you as a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6).

"Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations" (Isa 51:4).

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). He demonstrates being the light of the world by healing a man who had been born blind (Jn 9). After his physical sight was restored, the man's spiritual sight increased as he came to know Jesus better. That's what happens to us as we learn from the Lord to walk in his ways, as we walk in the light of the Lord.

The apostle Paul says, "So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ... clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh" (Rom 13:13-14).

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8).

"If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in

the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:6-7).

Let's go back to Isaiah: "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (60:19).

We see the fulfillment of that in God's new creation, the New Jerusalem, the fullness of God's kingdom: "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it" (Rev 21:23-24).

As we put up our lights this year, as we see all the displays of Christmas lights around us, as we light more candles each week, let's remember God, the Father of lights, who gives every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Let's remember Jesus, the Light of the World who shines on us and in us and through us so that we (the Church) become light of the world, a shining city on a hill (Matthew 5:14-16). Let's remember and experience the Holy Spirit who is God's presence within us, teaching us, leading us in God's ways, enabling us to walk in the light of the Lord.