

"OUR GREAT LIGHT"
 (Isaiah 9:2,6-7)
 [CHRISTMAS EVE MESSAGE]

[Prop Needed: Individual glowstick or candle]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 12-24-22]

--I--

1. Read texts: Isaiah 9:2,6-7 and Pray.

2. Darkness can be a terrible thing, and can cause terrible feelings.

A--Probably every one of us can think of times in our lives when we experienced the fear and uncertainty of darkness.

1--Oh, it may have been as infants when we were afraid to be left alone at night.

2--Or perhaps as children when we were scared to go down into the basement.

3--Or even as adults coming home to a dark house late at night after work.

B--Whenever it was, probably most of us can relate to the strange feelings that darkness brings upon us.

3. I remember a number of years ago near Christmas, Trish and I took our then-young daughter Jennifer driving thru a nearby subdivision that had advertised that it would be lit with luminaries until 10pm that evening.

A--When we arrived, a sign at the entrance welcomed us and requested that we drive thru the subdivision **only** with parking lights on.

B--So, we complied and turned off our headlights.

C--And while the decorations on the houses were beautiful, we found that since we were driving through at 9:30 p.m., many of the luminaries had already burned out.

D--The result was that we often found ourselves driving in nearly complete darkness.

4. Now to be honest, neither of us was too crazy about driving when we couldn't see where we were going.

A--It was a strange feeling -- being in motion, but not knowing if there was something in the middle of the road or sometimes if we were even on the road.

B--Sure, we could have turned our headlights back on, but as soon as we did, we would come to another area where the luminaries were still lit.

C--So, for the most part, we continued to simply drive without headlights through the streets of the subdivision.

D--And after we'd seen all the houses & beautiful decorations, we were glad that we had.

5. Now that was a relatively harmless experience with darkness.

A--But for many people, darkness is a way of life.

B--And I'm not talking about the physical darkness as "absence of sunlight," either.

6. No. There are other kinds of darkness as well:

A--There is *darkness of the heart*, which takes no account of the needs of others, and feels no further than one's own selfish desires.

B--There is *darkness of the mind*, which revolves around the vain notion of self-sufficiency -- that "*I don't need anyone else to help me get through life -- I can make all on my own.*"

C--And then there's *darkness of the soul*, which fails to see the spiritual realities of our world, and instead comprehends nothing beyond the physical realm.

D--For many of us, these forms of darkness are familiar friends.

E--And over the last few years, we've all unfortunately had to confront the persistent "darknesses" of pandemic, racial injustice, natural disaster, war, gun violence, and political division.

7. You see I believe that, like my family and I driving around in that neighborhood, there are many of us today driving around the roads of life without headlights,...

A--...thinking that we know the road ahead and can plan for the future, and so we think we don't need light to see -- we've got our cushy career, a spouse, 2.5 kids, and a dog -- what more could we need!?

B--And then suddenly, the road turns, or an obstacle unexpectedly appears in our way -- an accident, natural disaster, job loss, divorce, financial collapse, a pandemic,...

C--...and we find ourselves wrecked on the side of life's "long and winding road," wondering "*what in the world just happened?!*"

D--And all because... we had no light to guide or show us the way.

8. But hear again the words from the Bible of the prophet Isaiah read earlier tonight:
"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness -- on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

A--You know, at Christmas we Christians celebrate the fact that God chose to make Himself known to us in the form of Jesus Christ, who WE call the "light of the world."

B--This "light" did not come already fully grown or in full majesty, because if it had, it would have overwhelmed us and frightened us by the awesomeness of his glory.

C--Instead, Jesus -- the "light of the world" -- came as a tiny baby born in a smelly barn, laid in a cattle trough, and wrapped in plain, ordinary bands of cloth.

9. **[4:30pm ONLY... So, as the band comes back up,...]** let me simply point out that tonight, the question that each of us needs to ask ourselves is:...

A--Are we willing to allow God's "great light" -- the Christ-child -- to become the "great light" of OUR lives?

1--Oh, he may be the light of the *WORLD*, but is he the "great light" in *OUR* life?

2--That is: through Jesus, are we willing to allow God to change us so that we can be and become the husband, wife, child, parent, boss, employee, friend, the neighbor that God created us to be?

3--Psalm 36:9 says that *"In His light we see light."* -- in the "great light" of God, we are able to see WHO we are, WHOSE we are, and WHO we can become.

B--Tonight, as we celebrate the coming of the true light of God, which enlightens us all, I invite us all to allow God's "great light" -- Jesus the Christ-child-- to become the "great light" in OUR lives, as well.

10. [PRAY]

11. **[6:30pm ONLY... Christmas Holy Communion; ONLINE: have bread and juice ready...]**

12. [CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHTING & "SILENT NIGHT"]
6:30pm ONLINE ONLY: I want to invite you to have your candle(s) and lighter ready (1 candle/person) as we prepare for our time of candlelighting as we sing "Silent Night"

BOTH SERVICES: As we prepare for our time of candlelighting, please take the candle you were given when you arrived and have it ready to be lit as we sing "Silent Night"