

December 17, 2023

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

“And He will be Called... Day Spring.”

Isaiah 9:1-5 (2)

On Thursday this week (Dec. 21<sup>st</sup>) we will experience the winter solstice. This is the time of year when our part of the earth is tilted furthest away from the Sun and as a result the day is the shortest it will be all year. Starting on Friday, the days will begin to get longer again, although it is hard to believe that as January always seems to be such a long month where it is dark when we leave for work, and dark when we come home from it. But that is likely more about perception than reality.

However we perceive things, we are in the darkest season of the year, and we look forward to when it will get lighter. That first day when we wake up to the sun on the horizon instead of just the dark of night is almost like having a weight lifted from our shoulders. There is a little more bounce in our step, and we aren't so gloomy when we head off to work or school or whatever it is that we need to be doing. For months we have wandered in darkness, as it were, but the light will finally come.

As we pause on this third Sunday of Advent to reflect on names for the Messiah as recounted in the O Antiphons and made more familiar through the song O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, we arrive at the verse calling him the Day Spring, or the Rising Sun.

According to Isaiah, the people (primarily meaning the Israelites – both from the northern and southern kingdoms as they had been divided up after David and Solomon had died) were walking in darkness themselves. This was not a darkness resulting from the lack of daylight. This was darkness resulting from the destruction of the kingdoms and the conquest that they faced under the Assyrians. Imagine the confusion, uncertainty, and lack of hope that those people would have been experiencing. They thought of themselves as God's people. The

idea that God would abandon them was not something they could conceive of, and yet that is exactly what seemed to have happened. God had not abandoned them, but He certainly had allowed them to experience the consequences of their disobedience to Him. So, much like a person groping around in a dark room on a winter morning, they would have been groping around to find again their identity and place in the world and to search for their God – but they had no way of being guided towards that.

Until, that is, light is given to them. This is what Isaiah is promising. Not an immediate band-aid fix, but a deep healing that reveals the darkness within and brings light through and not just over it. There is hope for the nation in the Day Spring that will come. But, as we know, this light does not come as expected (although Isaiah does in several places in chapters 7-9 point to the Messiah as a child). He comes in a manger, weak and helpless. Reliant upon human parents to care for him, to nurture him, and to raise him to adulthood. He comes not to press down the darkness under weight of power and might, but to abolish it, to dissolve it just as the rising sun dissolves the darkness of night through fully inhabiting the sky and all it shines upon. The Messiah comes and brings that light, is that light, to eliminate darkness in the lives of people.

We can understand this in part as the “darkness within” – those sinful, evil, things in our human nature that cause so much conflict and drive such a deep wedge between us and God, but we can also understand it as the darkness of confusion, of uncertainty, of being lost and not knowing where to find our place in the world and beyond. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we all have a sense that there is more to our lives than just existing on this planet for 80 or 90 years. There is something in our being that has been created to long for more. And the darkness is in not knowing what that is, in trying to satisfy that longing with our own power and our own initiative. But we cannot succeed, and so humanity stumbles along in darkness.

Jesus, the Messiah, comes as the light. He reveals to us the eternal home that we know we should have. He shines light on the road that must be taken to get there.

He exposes the darkness within us and drives it away with his light. He is, as John points out in the first chapter of his gospel, the light of the world even though the world does not recognize him. His light is life, and it is through His life, and death, that light remains and pushes back the darkness.

God is revealed in that light. Love is allowed to grow and flourish under that light. Forgiveness is sought and given under the exposure of the light. The common ground of being human is illuminated for all to see under the light of the world.

And so, we turn our faces to the light, calling out with the song “O Come O Come Emmanuel” for the Light of the World to disperse the gloom and drive away the darkness so that we may come fully into the glory of God’s presence for all eternity.

Amen.

Let’s Pray.