

December 25, 2017
Christmas Day
John 1:1-18

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Another way to translate this is *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not mastered it.”*

There is no shortage of darkness trying to overcome the light of Christ shining into humanity. The darkness nearly won once, but God sent a flood to save believing Noah and his family through that water. And the world seemed completely dark again when God called unbelieving Abraham to faith and renewed the promise in his hearing. That promise made God’s chosen people Israel, but the darkness mastered them again and again until they in their sin and idolatry thoroughly shattered that old covenant regarding the promised land of Canaan and they were exiled to Babylon.

Still, God was faithful to His promise. Israel returned and though now a conquered nation, the Messiah is born. The darkness is still right there, but God won’t let it triumph. Joseph doubts and plans divorce, God sends an angel in a dream to guide him to faithful obedience. Herod seeks the child’s destruction, God reroutes the Magi and directs Joseph to flee to Egypt.

Later the Christ in His ministry teaches and preaches openly. The darkness tries continually: temptation in the wilderness, tricky questions of scheming Pharisees, worldly ambitions of His own disciples, fanatical crowds desiring only a military winner or a bread king to feed hungry bellies. The darkness still cannot overcome Him. He stays the humble course, according to the will of the Father.

Then, one Friday, it looks like the darkness wins. It actually gets unnaturally dark outside. But truth be told, the Christ sets the time for the cross and willingly goes there. It looks like death takes Him, but it is He who gives up His spirit. What looks like deep darkness

triumphing is in reality sin and death being overcome. Jesus is not mastered by the darkness. His light shines. In His resurrection He claims the mantle of Master and Lord over sin, death and Satan forever. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The light shines in victory forever.

This is the Christ-mass miracle—not that a little baby was born 2000 years ago, not even that this baby was the Son of Almighty God in heaven. This is just the beginning. The miracle is that this Christ kept shining His light and love through a perfect human life and through a horrible human death to life again, and keeps on shining. His light can't be stopped by space or time, and most certainly not by darkness. His light shined back through history to all the faithful who believed the promise of God. And His light shines forward in history to you this day.

This is the Gospel, and it's critical that we not only remember it, but dwell on it often in devotion, meditation, prayers, praise and worship. Why? Look around! The darkness is still all over the place!

We live in a culture that more and more is rejecting Christ, His church and anyone who believes on His name. We're being called irrational fools for putting our faith in an unchangeable God rather than in the "rational" flights and fancies of the philosophy de jour or the day's popular science, much of which isn't science but instead politically driven theory. Sin is called "choice". Immorality is called "preference". Lies are deemed valid and absolute truth is called hate speech. We're walking through a tornado of worldliness and we need the anchor that is Christ.

His light shines truth. His Word is truth. All of Holy Scripture is centered around Him. The world tempts us to jettison this Word so that we can be "enlightened". That's Satan's lie!

Absent this Word made flesh we are dark as death and separated from God. Apart from Christ, we are overcome.

The world's darkness around us isn't the only reason we have need of this light shined into our humanity in Bethlehem so long ago. There is darkness within each of us. Our original sinful nature inherited from Adam sticks to us. Day after day we try to fight it, but we fail. Some days we don't even try, we just roll with it and follow sinful paths.

Then the prince of lies and darkness whispers in our ear, "It's all over, the darkness has overcome you. The darkness has mastered you. You're lost. Why fight?" It is very tempting to give up, go with the flow, stop fighting the world and your nature and just get along.

This is why it is critical we do not allow ourselves to drift from Christ. For the Christian, yes, there will be bad days. There will be those tough times when the sinful world pushes against us and maybe we don't push back with the faithful zeal that we should. There will be times when we fall into willful sin, and its guilt and shame weigh heavy upon us. And of course in this broken life there will be those times when we are just plain hurt: hurt by betrayals of other sinners, or hurt by the betrayals of our own bodies failing us, hurt by the world just being unfair or busted—whatever. Sometimes our days just seem dark; dark as night.

But for the Christian, when things are the darkest, Christ and the healing He brings shines the brightest. In the darkest times in our life we see that the world is failing, and that Christ never will. We see that St. Paul is correct, *"To live is Christ and to die is gain."*

This does not and will not look like much to worldly eyes. Jesus never did. In Bethlehem a newborn without even a house or crib. In Jerusalem a fool tortured and beaten. On Golgotha, the corpse of a criminal.

Yet we know, 2000 years later, that Jesus is King and Lord of all. His holiness comes from the manger daily, washing you in your Holy Baptism. His forgiveness won at the cross absolves you through the Gospel proclaimed in His Word. His victory becomes yours in receiving His risen body and blood into your body and blood giving salvation, life and pardon. To the world and the worldly these things look like empty ritual. To those who the Holy Spirit has enlightened by faith, these are Christ, the light shining His eternal life and love into your personal darkness.

A new year is upon us, and without a doubt, many days will seem dark. There will be hurts inflicted by strangers and those we love and trust. There will be our own stumblings in sin when we shamefully catch ourselves causing the hurts. There will be hardship, sickness, pain, and maybe even death. Strive to remain in Christ every day, so that when the darkness comes you automatically put the truth to the darkness's lie: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it!

Sin, death and darkness have not and cannot master you, because the Christ was born into your flesh and the darkness did it's worst and cannot overcome Him! In Christ, the light not only shines in you, it endures in you unto eternity.

So when the darkness seems at it's worst, look back to the manger, the cross, the empty tomb and see your Savior triumphing over the darkness for you. When the world or your own self fails you, look to the Word, the Water, the Supper, and see His light shining. In the face of dark death look forward to His light in eternity and remember, it is for you.

Amen.