

## Light that, Shine in the Darkness

Text: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 (Series B, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent) Ps. 126

John 1:6-8, 19-28

***God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message, and believe. He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light. This was the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all people.***

### Let us pray:

On this Third Sunday of Advent, we light the rose-colored candle to symbolize the joy and anticipation of Christ's birth which is now in sight. Darkness generally is associated with things that are bad, evil and with death. Under the cover of darkness many crimes are committed. We think of many acts of cruelty and violence as coming from our dark side. Death is described as something dark and sinister.

There is a city located in the very north of Norway is an ordinary city except for the months of November through to January when the sun does not rise above the horizon. I've read that during this period of perpetual night, *"Those who are emotionally healthy the rest of the year become tense, fearful, preoccupied with thoughts of suicide.*

*During this period of darkness, the least desirable elements in humanity come to the surface: envy, greed, suspicion, crime. The citizens long for the light and hate to be alone. They install neon lights around their windows".*

Darkness in people's lives can differ from one person to the next. The darkness may be endless poverty. There are so many hungry, homeless people in our world even though there is plenty of food and space.

For another person darkness is the way we are destroying the earth through pollution and waste – leaving our children and grandchildren a planet that is only a shadow of its former beauty.

To a child in a war torn country, the darkness is foreign troops driving through his / her village, each plundering, killing, raping, and striking fear into the hearts of those who are left. To a mother the darkness is trying to get enough food to feed her children or adequate shelter.

For another person darkness is struggling with an illness, the aches and pains of old age, loneliness, losing the struggle with failing abilities and entering a nursing home. For some darkness is impending death of a loved one.

Whatever is yours or my temptation – the darkness within us comes out in sinful words and deeds. Hatred. Greed. Doing what we please even though our actions have a detrimental affect on others and even on ourselves. Turning away from a person in need. Selfishness. All the things that Satan, the prince of darkness, brings into our lives.

Make no mistake there is darkness inside us. It is the darkness of sin. To deny it, is to deny who we are as human beings. How does darkness manifest itself in our life? What outward words and actions we know are not what God wants from his people, yet we keep banging at it.

In fact, sometimes the darkness becomes so much a part of our way of living that we have difficulty recognizing that the darkness is something evil in whatever shape and form it presents itself.

Some mistake darkness for the light. They say that they are enlightened because they don't have any hang-ups. They are enlightened because they enjoy sexual freedom, drugs, use people for their own gain, unscrupulous in their business dealings, and unsympathetic on whose have fallen on tough times, after all it's their own fault. Some may call this being enlightened, but to God's way of thinking it is darkness.

Today our text focuses on John the Baptist. Last week we saw him in the wilderness calling out to all who came to hear him, "*Repent. Turn away from your sin. Be baptized and God will forgive your sin*".

Today we hear John being quizzed by the religious leaders about his identity. Who is he? Is he Elijah, a prophet, even the Messiah? John makes it quite clear who he is. He is the voice. *"I am the voice of someone shouting in the wilderness"*, John says. He is the voice who has *come to tell about the light. This was the real light – the light that comes into the world and shine on all people"*.

The prophet Isaiah talked about the dawn of God's light in the world and its effect. *"Arise, Jerusalem, shine like the sun; the glory of the Lord is shining on you. Other nations will be covered with darkness, but on you the light of the Lord will shine. ... Your days of grief will come to an end. I, the Lord, will be your eternal light" (Isaiah 60:1,2,19).*

The New Testament link to this Hebrew Scripture, is found in John's Gospel when Jesus speaks about himself, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness" (John 8:12)*. The prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. What an impact Christ the light has had on the darkness in our lives and in the world!

As we prepare for the Christmas season light plays a significant part. Driving around the darkened streets in Brossard or NDG, you see houses decorated with lights. What is normally just an ordinary house, suddenly draws our attention with the addition of hundreds of tiny light bulbs.

Many people have decorated Christmas trees in their homes and an important feature is the lights. The lights change an ordinary looking tree into something magnificent. John the Baptist said that Jesus is the real light, the genuine light who changes things. He is forgiveness.

- He is hope. He is encouragement. He is a word of love. He is strength.
- He is what we need to lighten our personal darkness.
- He is light to every person who has need of super-human strength to see through the darkness of trouble and sickness.
- He is the light who guides us along life's journey when we have more questions than we have answers.

- He is the light that dispels the darkness of guilt with his forgiveness and the darkness of fear when we take our last breath. He is the light of life, eternal life.

Whatever way darkness presents it self in our lives, Christ has come to be a light for us. Wherever there is darkness in our family, in our friendships, in our community, Christ has come to shed light on all those areas of our lives to restore peace and harmony and joy.

Wherever there is darkness in our nation or in the world at large, Christ has commanded us to let our light shine before people, to use whatever means we have at our disposal to relieve the suffering of others and drive out the darkness that shrouds the lives of so many. We are to let the light of Christ shine through us so that the darkness of evil might be dispelled.

*Pastor Vince Gerhardy* of Australia told a story that in 1981 thousands of people suffered from an influenza epidemic in Australia. During the height of that plague, churches and all public gathering places were closed in order to stem the spread of the disease.

Burdened by his inability to reach out to people in their time of need, the pastor thought of his church and its magnificent stained glass windows. Those windows faced a main street and many people passed by the church everyday.

The pastor had many floodlights placed inside the church; the light shining through the glass to the outside world gave passers-by the full effect of the windows' story.

There for all to see were the timeless portrayals of Jesus:

- Jesus the good shepherd carrying a lamb;
- Jesus the searching Saviour rescuing the lone lost sheep while the ninety-nine rested safely in the fold; Jesus praying in Gethsemane;
- Jesus on the cross; Jesus risen from the dead.

The silent sermons of light and stained glass spoke an eloquent message. People who passed by the church would stop reverently, silently. They found themselves filled with new hope and encouragement.

In the darkness that filled their lives the light streaming from those windows reminded them of "*the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all people*", to use John's words.

When we look at the little child in the manger at Christmas, look at the one who will meet us at our point of darkness, whatever that darkness is for you and I. His love never changes.

Now is the time to respond to God's invitation to discover his grace, to experience the true love, true joy of Christ's first coming. We live in a culture of excess, Advent offers us an opportunity to look beyond the artificial trappings, fun and exciting as they are, and seek to find the authentic message of the season.

Now is the time to seek *restoration* and *rejoicing* in Faith, finding the true *reason for the season* that carries over into our every day of living. In his light, we find the strength to carry on. In his light, the darkness is replaced with *Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Forgiveness. Amen.*

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