

Have you ever been left in the dark? Have you ever wondered if there was a light at the end of the tunnel? Have you been stuck in a state of darkness and feared there may be no hope for you or maybe even someone else? If you have answered yes to any of these questions, there is good news.

The light referenced throughout this passage is a light that does nothing short of change life and make it better. As John writes, the "light is life"; it gives life, guides life, and sustains life. In the scriptures, light is one of the most prominent and permeating themes. The light is sometimes called the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, or the Light of Life.

And there may not be any more of a fitting message for us in this Christmas season than to reflect upon THE light- THE light that God spoke into being during creation, THE coming light of Christ promised to the early Israelites, THE light of the world born on that first Christmas day, and THE light that continues to shine bright and guide the church and our lives today.

One of the things that makes the message of light so paramount for us is the overwhelming presence of darkness in us and around us and throughout the world. We need THE light and whole lot of it. We can't really talk about light without talking about darkness, can we? When God first created light, the scriptures reveal that God called light out of the darkness. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God separated light from darkness, and declared, "It is good." We also have God's promise that darkness will never be able to overcome the eternal and all-powerful light of God. It is only natural that we view light and darkness as two different things. They have to coexist or there is nothing to compare and no need to distinguish the difference. Like that of good and bad. Can we know what is good without also knowing what is bad? A colleague of mine once challenged the thought "what if we considered that there is only light, and that darkness exists only in the absence of light!" Where do we get to if we chew on that a bit.

This Christmas I want to challenge each of us to be blinded by the light- God's light- and to allow God's light to overcome whatever darkness may be in us or around us or throughout the world. To be clear, however great a song it is, this is different than what the popular song "Blinded by the Light" written by Bruce Springsteen offers. If we can allow ourselves to be blinded by God's light, we will discover that God's light is one that gives, guides, and sustains us in each and every day of our lives.

At Christmas time, the light we may think of more than any other is the Star of Bethlehem. The star of Bethlehem, or as some refer to it, the Star of David, changed life when it appeared. The

presence of the star set magi on a new course to greet the new king, gave new meaning and opportunity, and even woke some people up by diverting them from the wrong path. If you have ever seen the movie *The Star*, an animated depiction of Jesus birth from the perspective of a donkey, there is a scene that even shared how the light kept the animals in the stable awake, so much the goat is quite delirious by the time Mary and Joseph appear at the stable.

Another light we may think of is the illumination of angels in our midst. As the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and as the angels appeared to the shepherds, it is told a bright light appeared with the good news of God.

What are we to make of this? We are to take away nothing short of the good news that THE light that signifies God's incarnation changes lives. It is the light of true life.

To be blinded by the light might make us think of a time when we looked up at the sun. It was likely right after someone told you, "Whatever you do, don't look directly at the sun, it will hurt your eyes." And that is true. Looking directly into the blazing and beaming ball of gas that is the sun can indeed hurt your eyes. It leaves you seeing double or maybe even blind to all other things for a few moments.

However, there is a light, a S.O.N., in which we can look directly into that does not hurt us? The Light of Christ is a divine energy, power, or influence that proceeds from God through Christ and gives life and light to all things. It's true we might still squint from time to time. It's true we might feel a bit uncomfortable or wheezy with what God asks of us. We might even want to close our eyes. And there is no doubt the Light of Christ can leave us blind to certain things, but all in a good way. Looking directly into and being blinded by the Light of Christ is transforming and renewing. The Light of Christ influences people for good (John 1:9) and prepares them to receive the Holy Ghost.

There are lots of examples of God's light transforming and renewing, but one of the most notable in scripture is when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets containing the 10 commandments. What did the Israelites see in relation to Moses? Moses was different. Not only did he look different, for there was a glow about him, but he walked differently and carried himself differently. Moses' face shined bright because of the light of God shining in him and through him. After his encounter with God, Moses had been blinded by the light and now reflected the glory of God in goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Moses is not the only one though. We see it with Abraham, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, Ruth, Mary, John the Baptist, Jesus, the disciples, and Paul. And it is my belief that God's desire from the beginning of creation was to place God's light, God's Spirit, in each of us as our main source of inspiration and motivation for living. God intended for us to be blinded by the light so that all we could see was in relationship to God and God's will and God's way.

God doesn't want us, God's children, to live our lives in a state of darkness (sin, brokenness). Therefore, God provides a way out of darkness. "For God so loved the world, that God gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)" This incarnate love brought to life in Jesus is, as we read in John 1, the light of life. John quotes Jesus, "I am the light for the world! Follow me, and you won't be walking in the dark. You will have the light that gives life. (John 8:12)"

You want to know more about the transformation and renewal in store for us as we are blinded by the light? Read and reflect on Ephesians 5:8-14. What Paul writes to the early church in Ephesians are instructions for how to walk in the light, including tools needed each day to remain in the light, illuminate Christ's light, and deflect darkness. An important note as you read this text is to understand that "to walk as Children of light" literally means to walk around. From early times, Jews used the word "walk" to speak of the manner or description of how one conducted their lives.

Therefore, just as we have been invited at the conclusion of each of our Advent Wreath Lightings throughout this season, to "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord", I pray we can each be blinded by God's light and allow THE TRUE LIGHT OF CHRIST, THE ONLY TRUE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, to fill us, guide us, and sustain us all.

In Philippians 4:8, Paul charges, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." In short, Paul is saying focus on Christ, for Christ is all of these things and more. Just as the Star of Bethlehem shined bright on the stable in which Jesus was born, may we be blinded by God's light. And as we are blinded by the light, may we faithfully embody God's call for us to walk as Children of the Light, and may others who do not yet know of Christ's light receive the good news of God's love for them as well. This is hopeful. This is shalom, peace, well-being. This is joy, that transcends circumstances. This is love, true love. Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and goodwill to all.

Let all God's people say... Amen.