

"Behold, He Comes to Give Us Light" 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 Advent 3 2022

In the Collect for today, we prayed to Christ, imploring Him “to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by [His] gracious visitation.” Such a prayer is appropriate to our lives, with hearts darkened by sin, as well as to our days of light shortened at this time of the year with the onset of winter approaching. In the service of Evening Prayer, we give thanks to God for the light we have received: Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation and we, Your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. [LSB p. 245]

In this prayer we join our voices with the Psalmist [119:105], confident that the Word of the Lord will bring light to our darkness. We live in a dark world, dark not just because the hours or daylight are much shorter now than in the summer, but because we live in the darkness of an unbelieving world, and our hearts are darkened by sin. We live in the darkness of night, just as it was night, as St. John writes, in the soul of Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus—words that ring out each time the bread and wine are consecrated as also being the body and blood of Christ: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed...” We live in darkness, but light comes—and

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increasingly so. Each Sunday during this Adventide another candle on the Advent wreath is lit, and on Christmas Eve, the light from the wreath will pale in comparison to the Christmas tree being lit on Christmas Eve, when we begin our celebration of the birth of Christ, the Son of God, Son of Man, and Sun of righteousness.

At the beginning of Evening Prayer, a Procession of Light takes place. As the Paschal candle is processed down the aisle, three sets of verses are spoken or chanted responsively: Jesus Christ is Light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening, and the day is almost over. Let Your light scatter the darkness, and illumine Your Church. [LSB p. 243]

The light will indeed scatter the darkness, but those who choose to live in the darkness will dread that day, for when the Lord comes on the Last Day (His final coming), His light will expose the deeds, words, and innermost thoughts of the unrepentant and unfaithful, those who refuse to acknowledge and confess their sins and those who do not confess and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. When you're in a dark room and rats are scurrying about, what are you going to do? You may want to scream and run, but you turn on the light. The rats will scatter and return their dark corners. That's the way it is for those who continue to live in sin, both in the sin they inherited from their

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parents going all the way back to Adam and Eve, as well as the sins they have committed since their conception. We judge no one. God's Word does that, and when Christ comes on the Last Day, those sins will be disclosed, exposed, and judged. And those who lived apart from Christ will spend eternity in the light of the fires of hell. It can be a terrible thing to be remembered by the Lord, especially when one has forgotten Him. When we sin and do not confess our sin before God but rather try to hide it from Him, we place a self-imposed barrier between ourselves and God. We separate ourselves from Him. What is hell? It is the eternal separation from God that is reserved unbelievers and unrepentant sinners. This is not where we want to be, "[b]ut when we examine our hearts and consciences, we find nothing in us but sin and death, from which we are incapable of delivering ourselves" [LSB p. 290], as we confessed earlier. So what are we to do in the midst of our darkness? What are we to do in the darkness of our spiritual blindness? What are we to do in the darkness of night in our souls, as it was in Judas' soul? What are we to do in our darkness, even as the sky turned dark on Good Friday, when Jesus was dying upon the cross of Calvary?

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The answer lies in the events of Good Friday. The answer lies in Jesus Christ. The answer lies in what He did for us while He was on the cross. Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, took upon Himself the darkness of our sins and the sins of the whole world so that we would bask in the light of God's forgiveness. Jesus, the Son of God, personally went through the darkness of hell for us, forsaken by His Father so that God would not forsake us. Jesus, the Son of Man, bled while on the cross so that we and all who believe in Him would live, for there is life in His blood. In the Old Testament, God forbade the consumption of blood. In that prohibition He said, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Lev. 17:11). That blood is here—in the Lord's house—at His altar. It is the body and blood of crucified and risen Jesus Christ, who has made the atonement for your souls and for the life of the world by sacrificing Himself upon the altar of the cross. He gave His body and poured out His blood there as the atoning Sacrifice for us and for the whole world. Christ, the Lamb of God, has taken away the sin of the world, had mercy upon us, and given us His peace. On the third day He rose to give us life and light. The gifts have been won on the cross and are now given in His Word and Sacraments: "A light to lead the Gentiles unto [His] holy hill, the glory of [His] people, [His] chosen Israel" [LSB p. 211]. Words of the

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prophet Isaiah will be read in many churches at Christmas, but these words are especially fitting today for us, as "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (Is. 9:2), the light of Christ, who lightens our souls with His forgiveness. And by the Holy Spirit we are able to say with the Psalmist: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4)...Your Word and Your Sacraments, they bring me joy. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Ps. 23:5a), You have prepared Your table to give us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Supper of Your Son's body and blood. "You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over" (Ps. 23:5b). You have washed us with water and Your Word and have called us Your children, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—heirs of the promise of eternal life with You in heaven, where "there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever...Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen