

December 10, 2025 – Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; John 1:1-9

When I was a kid, we would go to my grandmother's house for Thanksgiving every year. Thanksgiving morning, my mom and sisters and I would pile into the station wagon and travel to western New York. It was usually a pretty dreary drive, with the fall foliage long gone and the world pretty brown.

But the drive back on Sunday was a different story. Because over the holiday weekend, everyone had been hard at work putting up Christmas lights. And the drive back that evening was filled with oohs and ahhs as we watched for brightly lit houses along the dark highway home. After miles of darkness, even a single string of lights seemed beautiful. Every glow on the horizon made us wonder just how bright the display would be.

I think that memory captures something of what Isaiah described when he wrote, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."* Of course, Isaiah wasn't talking about the gloom of late November or the short days of early winter. He was speaking of a deeper darkness. A spiritual night that lay over Israel because of sin, unbelief, and confusion.

And Isaiah names a specific region: "Galilee of the nations." This wasn't accidental. Galilee was the first area invaded when Assyria swept into Israel in the eighth century BC, just a few years after Isaiah wrote this. Stripping the land of its people, deporting many into exile, and repopulating the towns with Gentile settlers loyal to Assyria.

The result was a region where pagan practices flourished alongside remnants of Israel's worship. Galilee was geographically distant from Jerusalem and spiritually distant from Israel's confidence and hope. It was a borderland where darkness seemed to reign. A land of deep, deep darkness.

We know a similar darkness in our day and age. Our technology glows brighter every year, our cities shine with more and more people, and yet the human heart remains in the dark without God. The world claims to be enlightened, but the blindness Isaiah described remains.

People search endlessly for meaning and truth. They move from ideology to ideology, from spiritual fad to spiritual fad. They seek something to give their lives shape and hope. But it's the blind leading the blind. People trapped in darkness guiding other people trapped in darkness.

And this isn't just a metaphor. Paul says in 2 Corinthians that *"the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers."* Without Christ, the human mind cannot see His glory. It cannot see why He matters. It cannot see the depth of its own sin. Pride blinds. Fear blinds. Desire blinds. In our sinfulness, our hearts are simply unable to see the light.

Which is why Isaiah's promise is so important. Because into a world that cannot lift its own darkness, God sends light from above. A Child is born. A Son is given. Isaiah piles up names that shine like a thousand twinkling light bulbs: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The Light that rises on the land of darkness is God Himself, born as a child, come to reign with justice and righteousness forever. Come directly into Galilee of the nations, a place so desperately in need of God's light. He is a Light that does not flicker. A Light that cannot fade. A Light that is guaranteed by the zeal of the Lord of hosts.

The apostle John identifies this Child. The Light of Isaiah is the Word who was in the beginning. The Word through whom all things were made. Before the first candle was ever lit, before the first star burned in the heavens, this Light existed. *"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

Notice the verb tense: shines. Not shone, as though it were only a past event. Not will shine, as though we must wait for it. The Light shines now. Christ entered our darkness in His incarnation, taking on our frailty. Christ entered our darkness on the cross, bearing the sin that blinds every heart. Christ entered our darkness in His death, lying in the place where sinners lie.

And Christ burst forth from that darkness in His resurrection. The darkness did not overcome Him. It cannot overcome Him. And it will not overcome those who belong to Him.

So if Christ is the Light, why does Paul say that His gospel is veiled to some? Well, because Satan, the “*god of this world*,” works fiercely to keep sinners blind. He is a deceiver, and he distracts us with things of this world to keep us in the dark. He distracts us with self-help, spiritual consumerism, moralistic messages, the worship of pleasure or success. He tells sinners they are fine as they are, that their darkness is harmless, that they can find their own way.

But God does something infinitely greater. Paul writes, “*For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts.*” Just as God once spoke light into the universe, He now speaks the light of Christ into your heart through the Gospel. On your own, there is no light within you. You can’t create it by your own wisdom. You can’t kindle it by your own effort. God Himself shines it. God creates faith. God opens blind eyes. God ends the night.

Which is really what I was getting at with that memory of watching for Christmas lights on the drive home. Those lights were not the sunrise. They couldn’t turn night into day. But they pointed to something. They hinted at joy that was coming soon. They gave a long, empty road a sense of anticipation. The darkness was still real, but it wasn’t the whole story. Something better was near.

That’s what Advent lights do for us. Each candle on the Advent wreath pushes back the shadows a little more, reminding us that we’re getting closer and closer to the celebration of Christ’s birth. These tiny flames proclaim a much bigger promise: The Light has come. The Light still shines. The Light will come again in fullness. The candles do not create that truth. They point to it. They teach us to watch.

The same is true for the lights we put on our homes and trees. They may be temporary, but they remind us of an eternal Light. Their glow makes the darkness seem a little less oppressive. Their beauty draws our eyes upward. And they give us a glimpse of the joy that Christ brings into the world. No matter how dark the winter becomes, no matter how long the night lasts, the Light of Christ remains.

And so, during these weeks of Advent, when you see lights along the road or glowing from the homes in your neighborhood or hanging from your own gutters and Christmas trees, let them become a kind of spiritual reflex. Let every brightness remind you that the true Light shines. Let every decorated house become a proclamation of the Child born for us. Let every candle teach you to watch for the dawn that Christ Himself will bring.

For the day is coming when all the world’s lights – every strand, every bulb, every candle – will seem dim compared to the brightness of Christ’s glory. Isaiah tells us that His kingdom will have no end. John tells us the darkness cannot overcome Him. Paul tells us God Himself has shone in our hearts. And Scripture promises that when Christ returns, night itself will be no more.

Until then, we watch. We wait. We walk by the Light that has already come into the world. And just as I once pressed my face against the cold car window, watching for the next house glowing along the highway, so we lift our eyes in expectation. Not for a decoration, but for a Savior. Not for a brief brightness, but for the eternal Light. And that Light shines for you. Amen.