

“Lights that Speak!”—Luke 2:9-12

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, *Lights that Speak!*, is Luke 2:9-12 → *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Marquees—electronic billboards and signs—store front signs—all lit up to get your attention and draw you into their messages. We are bombarded by such bright advertisements on a daily basis. And guess what? It works! It seems that the brighter and flashier the sign the more customers it will draw into their messages. They truly are lights that speak.

Verse 9 of our text tells us about *an angel* sent from *the LORD* who spoke through the light of God’s glory to some shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth. While this brightness in the midst of the darkness of the night certainly got their attention, it also *filled* them *with great fear*. I can

picture them on the ground, unable to look into such brightness, shaking in their sandals and wondering if they were in the midst of a vision or were even in heaven itself and about to meet God face to face.

We have numerous examples from the Scriptures where light accompanied *the glory of the LORD* whenever He revealed Himself to people. The LORD got Moses' attention through a burning bush (cf. Exodus 3:1ff.). After He delivered the Israelites from their slavery to Egypt He revealed His glory to them by a pillar of fire which guided them by night.

Moses reminded the Israelites about fire being connected with God's glory when He received the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 5:23-25 says that *as soon as they heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, they were filled with such tremendous fear they thought would immediately die. They said to Moses: Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and greatness, and we have **heard His voice out of the midst of the fire.** This day we have seen God speak with man and man still live. Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, we shall die.*

The **brightness** of God's glory played an important part in the apostle Paul's conversion when Jesus spoke to him. As he *approached Damascus . . . suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard Jesus speaking to him* (cf. Acts 9:3-4). While

on a mountain with three of His disciples, Matthew tell us that Jesus was *transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light as a **bright** cloud overshadowed them, and God spoke from the cloud* (cf. Matthew 17:2,5). The angel's appearance at Jesus' resurrection is described *like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.* (cf. Matthew 28:3-4)

Notice that when people experienced *the glory of the LORD* and His words they were usually filled with great fear. This is because God's perfect goodness, greatness and holiness reinforces the fact that we are sinners in His presence. Isaiah expressed this sentiment during the vision which accompanied his call into the prophetic ministry in Isaiah 6:5 → *Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*

Every revelation of God's glory required some kind of reassurance of God's grace and favor. In verse 10 of our text the angel said: *Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.* The voice of the angel speaking in the midst of the light of God's glory was meant to reassure those shepherds that they didn't have to be afraid in the presence of God because of the *good news* he was bringing. What was that *good news*? *For unto you is born this day in the*

city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. (cf. verse 11)

Despite their fear, the message coming through this brightness would have certainly gotten their attention, especially at the mention of the *Christ* being **born that day** in Bethlehem. *Christ* is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*—God’s promised Deliverer. They had been waiting for Him to come for hundreds of years. Hearing about the fulfillment of God’s promise happening in their presence that evening would have certainly been cause for *great joy*, not fear.

However, the next words which the angel spoke in verse 12 of our text would really challenge their faith: *This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. A manger?* The Messiah born and laid in a feeding trough for animals? Their expectation would have probably involved the Messiah coming in glory like they were experiencing with the angel’s message, with power and majesty. Not in the lowly conditions of animals. Yet, they still took the steps of faith and went looking for Him.

The glory of the LORD as revealed in Jesus is not cause for fear but for rejoicing because God has sent us *Christ the Lord* in the person of Jesus. **He is God’s glory in the flesh** (cf. John 1:14). However, God’s glory manifested itself in a very unexpected manner in Jesus. It was through humility, suffering and dying on a cross. God’s glory needed to be manifested in the darkness of sin so that we can be completely

forgiven of sin. As true God and true man Jesus obeyed God's Law perfectly **for us sinners** and was the perfect sacrifice **for us sinners**.

While many of the Jews of Jesus' day were expecting a Messiah Who would change their social situation and make their earthly lives better, God sent them a Messiah Who changed their lives because He spoke to their heart's greatest need for forgiveness of sins. I wonder if it isn't much different today as people celebrate Christmas all over the world. Do we think of Christmas as simply a time when we celebrate the hope of a better social condition with "peace on earth goodwill toward men?" What do people think of when they see these words up in lights speaking to them? Forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus or . . . more peaceful social conditions and a better standard of living?

As the Light of the world (cf. John 8:12) Jesus speaks primarily to the condition of your sinful heart and how your heart can be transformed in the midst of your social situations on earth. The *great joy* comes not simply because of the birth of a baby but because of the new birth the Holy Spirit brings about in your life as you hear Him speak to you in Word and Sacraments. Titus 3:4-7 says that *when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being*

justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

God sent Jesus to transform our hearts and lives by His Holy Spirit connecting us to His righteous works on our behalf—His suffering, dying and rising again to give us forgiveness of sins and a new life! It is *the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*, begun in your hearts in your baptism *so that we who . . . hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory* (cf. Ephesians 1:12).

The lights continue to shine and speak the *good news of great joy . . . for all the people*. As we trust in Jesus as our Savior from sin He desires to shine and speak through us as **Lord of our lives**. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus tells you to let the light of God's glory shine through you *before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven*.

In effect, you are the lights that speak to others about the forgiveness of sins in Christ; about the joy in Christ that comes from the hope of eternal life; about the peace in Christ which passes all understanding no matter what your social conditions may be. As your hearts are enlightened by the Holy Spirit daily through God's Word you become lights that speak through your words and *good works*, drawing others into the message of the *good news of great joy!*

During this season you may even display flashy lights on your

person. (*Display the flashing santa hat and the flashing bulb necklace.*)

While such lit up apparel may bring some to the conclusion that you're kind of weird, such lights may also reveal the joy you have celebrating Christmas. In fact, whenever people encounter them on you it may elicit a smile or laughter. Still, they can also remind us that we are lights that speak about *Christ the Lord*, sharing not only the message of the birth that changed history, but the new birth by the Holy Spirit which brings people to repentance and faith in Jesus as Christ the Lord, changing their hearts in life now and **forever**. You are indeed lights that speak for Christ. Amen.

*God, Who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"
has shone in our hearts
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ.*

(2 Corinthians 4:6)

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