

# “Your Light Has Come!”

Theme: Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 21:25-28



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In the black depths of the earth a Welsh coal miner lay quietly in the damp darkness. He had no food and very little water. He knew that all his fellow workers had been killed by the mine cave in. Now for three days he had barely existed in that little pocket of air, in that overwhelming darkness. Occasionally, he thought he heard a faint sound that would indicate a rescue operation was in progress, but he could not be sure. On the outside of the mine a rescue team was indeed working feverishly while family members waited by the mouth of the mine shaft. All feared what they might find, that no one would be alive. Still, a faint hope drove them on—for there was always a slight chance.

At last the break-through came. A voice spoke to the trapped miner through a tiny opening. A beam of light burst forth into the deep darkness in which the

miner lay. The rescuers now more determined than ever re-doubled their efforts with a new burst of energy. Although several lifeless bodies were later brought to the surface to sorrowing families, all rejoiced that one man had been found alive. A remnant had returned.

The rescued miner soon confronted the inevitable questions from the reporters who wanted to know what he had thought while lying there in that terrible darkness. Had he given up hope? What had kept him going? What did he think about? The miner answered that he had thought about those persons far above him in the light—those persons he loved and who loved him. He also said that he knew his friends would never give up until they found him, dead or alive.

Many of us here today, like that coal miner, know what it is like to live in the midst of terrifying darkness. What is it for you? The darkness of deteriorating relationships with others, the darkness of your own fears and anxieties, the darkness of unanswered questions or an uncertain future, or the darkness of a persistent problem or illnesses that never gets any better. Or is the darkness you experience that of a world gone mad, a world sitting on the edge of another world war, a world of chaos and futility.

It is in the midst of this kind of overwhelming darkness that the season of Advent bursts into our lives with its message of hope. We are told that however ominous may be the world situation or however difficult may be our own personal situations our ransom, our salvation, our deliverance is near. We are told to prepare ourselves again for the coming of Jesus, right into our lives and into our problems. We are told to prepare for the coming of the Light into our darkness. There is hope for each of us and for our world because the Lord's promise is trustworthy.

The prophet Jeremiah knew what it was like to live with hope in the midst of darkness. Almost six centuries before the time of Jesus he saw the coming defeat of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. He foretold that the finest people of the land would be taken off into captivity. Jerusalem itself would lay in ruin. Yet, despite Jeremiah's prediction of this terrible destruction and captivity, his message was also one of hope. For he also predicted that a remnant would return to Israel to rebuild the nation and re-establish the people of God. A remnant, defined as something that was left over, a small piece, a scrap. That certainly didn't seem like much hope, but Jeremiah believed in the power of God to do amazing things.

With the calamity of captivity soon to descend upon Israel, Jeremiah predicts that something great would also happen. Jeremiah tells of a shoot, from the root of David that would be raised up. David was the greatest king of Israel, who symbolized the golden age of the kingdom, which was now about to be overrun and destroyed. Certainly the people must have wondered as the great Babylonian army encircled them how much hope could there be in only a tender shoot. We can almost hear them say sarcastically “Come on, Jeremiah. We don't need a shoot, we need a whole forest!” Yet this symbol of the tender shoot epitomized the hope Jeremiah had for the future. In this symbol was embodied Jeremiah's faith in a God that does amazing things with small possibilities.

For out of this shoot from the root of David, Jeremiah foresaw a Messiah, a redeemer for his people. They would not forever live in the darkness and hopelessness of captivity. They would be a people again. They would be a nation again. Their faith would be established again. From the very line of David would come one to lead them. Jeremiah himself prob-

ably had no idea who that tender shoot would be. He simply knew that God would not forget his promise to Israel and Judah. God would certainly redeem them! Jeremiah was certain of that! No matter how bleak their current situation looked their salvation, their redemption was near.

Jesus also came to a people in a time of national anguish. The Romans were in power and it was a brutal occupation for Israel. King Herod the Great had just died and several Israelites used his death as an opportunity to lead rebellions against the Romans. Thousands of the faithful zealots joined the uprisings. But the Romans put down the rebellions with relentless fury. Then they crucified 2,000 of the rebels along the roads around Jerusalem as an example to others who might have the same idea. It was a time of brutal military occupation, a time of stress and of anguish for the people of Israel.

Jesus lived his entire life under that oppressive rule. His coming did not banish the Roman captivity of the nation. Nor did he lead an army in revolt against the Romans. Probably many hoped that such a popular leader as he might do that, but he did not. Jesus simply lived among the people, loving them and offering them the salvation, the redemption of their lives. But most did not hear him. They were searching for something else and so they looked past Jesus and rejected the tremendous gift that he offered.

What about us? Are we missing out on Christ's great gift to us? Are we looking past him, by demanding that he make our lives easy and trouble free? Certainly in times of joy and comfort it is easy for all of us to acknowledge the presence of Christ and his love for us. But can we likewise acknowledge that love and that presence in our times of difficult or amidst the turmoil of the world? We need to remember that it

was into a world torn and in turmoil, as it is today that Jesus was born. Even in the midst of calamity, even in the midst of our darkness, we must trust that the Lord is with us. Our ransom, our deliverance is near at hand. God is faithful to the promise and God will not forget us.

Can you believe that? Can you believe that no matter what kind of darkness you find yourself groping in Christ is with you, loving you. Thank for a moment of someone you love, but whom you have not seen for awhile. You may be separated from that person by a continent, or by an ocean. You may be separated by any number of circumstances and conditions, and yet the love between you still exists. A letter or a phone call refreshed that love. But even in the times of silence in between there is an assurance that the love is still there. Even when you are not aware of the fact of being loved, you are loved.

The love of Christ is like that. We are not always aware of it. But even when we are in the depths of whatever darkness holds our life at some moment, or when we feel utterly alone, we are loved. The message we hear in the Gospels is that the Lord indeed comes to us in those difficult times. It is no mere "whistling in the dark" for us to hold out hope, for the Lord does seek us out. Our salvation is near at hand.

The coal miners of Wales have a long tradition of singing hymns on their way to and from the mines. They work every day in a known yet accepted danger and this singing is a way of declaring their faith in the face of that danger. It is their assurance that even in the depths of the earth their salvation is at hand.

As we enter this Advent season, aware of the darkness and danger of the world, let us also hear the message of hope. It was only a small remnant that returned from Babylon and re-established the nation

of Israel. It was only a tender shoot from the root of David that a Savior came. It is with hope and trust in Christ's love and presence that we must prepare ourselves now to confront the darkness in our lives and in our world. In the midst of our problems and uncertainty we ask only the assurance of Christ's promises; reminders from him that our ransom is near and that our light has come.

There is a beautiful hymn by Lowell Mason often sung to a Welsh tune, which tells of those signs of promise in that dark night of the soul. It is in the form of a conversation between a traveler and a watchman. I'd like to close now by having us sing the first verse of this great hymn.

Watchman, tell us of the night,  
What its signs of promise are.  
Traveler, o'er yon mountain's height  
See that glory-beaming star?  
Watchman, does its beauteous ray  
Aught of joy or hope foretell?  
Traveler, yes; it brings the day.  
Promised day of Israel.  
Watchmen, tell us of the night,  
For the morning seems to dawn.  
Traveler, darkness takes its flight,  
Doubt and terror are withdrawn.  
Watchman, let your wanderings cease;  
Hasten to your quiet home.  
Traveler, lo, the Prince of Peace,  
Lo, the Son of God is come.

*Let us pray:*

Burst into the dark night of our souls, O Lord, with your radiant light. You, who has always loved us, brighten our way and assure us that you indeed have conquered the night. In the name of Jesus, our light and our hope, we pray. Amen.