

GraceCity Advent Study

Wonder



Study #2

December 12, 2021

“Wonder at Light” (Isaiah 9:2-7; John 1:5)

“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days, that you would not believe if told.” (Habakkuk 1:5 – ESV)

I don't know about you, but it sure can feel dark down here. Like the people described in Isaiah 9:2, we are not only walking in darkness, but also living in times of deep darkness. The good news we celebrate during the Christmas season is that the Creator of the universe has invaded the darkness, shining His glorious Light in all creation. Often, we find ourselves like the shepherds in the Christmas carol, going about our business, throughout the various darkneses of life and the glory of the Lord shines upon us, bringing the Good News of Life and Light.

John the Apostle sets us up for unexpected treasure as he makes it clear once and for all, that though light and darkness are opposites; they are not opposites of equal power. It is a rigged game, in our favor! The Light ALWAYS puts out the darkness.

Preparation:

- Are you afraid of the dark? Have you ever been lost in darkness? How did it feel?
- Have you ever had a wonder-filled experience involving light (sunrise, sunset, Northern lights, etc.)? How did it feel?

Read: [Isaiah 9:2-7](#) and [John 1:1-5](#)

Notes/Definitions:

Oracles of Isaiah – The Book of Isaiah contains several oracles, messages from God delivered by a prophet to the people. Most scholars agree that the one in Isaiah 9:2-7 was a coronation hymn celebrating the new king (Hezekiah), one who would put an end to the reign of an oppressive king (Ahaz). For Christians, this text is heard in reference to Jesus, the great light in the darkness.

John's Prologue – Unlike Matthew and Luke, which begin with genealogies, the Gospel of John begins with a prologue “that makes the story of Jesus begin in the very bosom of God (1:1).”¹ The prologue anticipates many of the themes of the book and introduces important images, like the Word (*logos*), light (*phōs*), and life (*zōē*).

Questions:

1. In the Scriptures, darkness often signifies despair, confusion, and sin (1 John 1:6; Ephesians 5:11; Zephaniah 1:15; Psalm 107:13-14). How have you and your community experienced darkness this past year?

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Writings of the New Testament,” Fortress Press, 2010.

This study has been developed for personal reflection and group discussion. To participate in the conversation, join a GraceCity small group. For more information on times and locations, email smallgroups@gracecitybaltimore.org.

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2. (Read Isaiah 9:3-5) What has God done? How does the coming of Christ bring this about? How do we experience this each Christmas and each day here in 2021?

Multiplied the nation (abundance), increased its joy (joy), broken the yoke of their burden, bar across their shoulder, rod of their oppressors (freedom), bloody boots/garments burned (peace)

3. (Read Isaiah 9:6) Examine each of the titles for the child. What does each title mean? How have you experienced Jesus as each of these? How do these titles for Jesus serve as a contrast to worldly authorities and ideologies?

Wonderful Counselor (wise, shrewd, discerning); Mighty God (filled with all powers required); Everlasting Father (generative powers of a king); Prince of Peace (one who will preside over, maintain, and perhaps impose an order on reality...an antidote to anxiety when things seem to be out of control)

Commenting on this passage, theologian and pastor Walter Brueggemann writes:

"What we have is a glorious, celebrate affirmation that Yahweh, through a human Davidic king, will create a wondrous new possibility for Judah that is unqualified and unconditional. The theological point is Yahweh's capacity and resolve for a newness that is completely fresh and without extrapolation from anything that has gone before...The 'darkness' refers to a situation of despair and oppression...and now light! 'Light' is regularly linked to the coming of Yahweh's 'glory,' that is, to the visible evidence of Yahweh's splendor, majesty, and sovereignty."²

4. (Read John 1:1-9) How is John using the metaphor of light in this passage? What does the light represent?

Light is the life of God, enlightening people; the presence of God embodied in Jesus

5. In both Isaiah and John passages, the light comes in spite of any work or action on the people's part. What does this teach us about God?

It is all an unsolicited, grace-filled, self-initiating work of God! Wonder at that!

6. (Read John 8:12 and Matthew 5:14-16) What does light represent in these passages? In what ways do Christians join in being the light of life?

7. (Read 2 Corinthians 4:6 and 1 John 1:5-7) What do we learn about God? What does the light symbolize for Jesus followers? What is the role of community in all this?

"I have my friend Jill to blame for my love of sunsets and sunrises. She was always so obsessed with them, and because of her wonder, I started to pay attention. Then I started to love them too. Her wonder kindled mine. Her wonder rubbed off on me! Often we need others to model lives of wonder-filled obedience for us." -Chinwe

8. In contrast to Question 1, how have you and your community experienced the Light of God's Presence this year/season? Weighing the darkness and the lightness you experienced, does one feel greater? Are darkness and lightness equal opposites?

² Walter Brueggemann, "Isaiah, Vol 1: Chapters 1-39," Westminster Bible Companion, 1993.

9. How can you practice waiting in wonder-filled expectation of God's intervention?

Consider the spiritual disciplines: prayer, meditating on Scripture, community, etc.

10. Although God can bring light without or in spite of any action on our part, what is the purpose of the Christian to be light in the mission of reconciling people to God and to one another? What role will you play?

Among other responsibilities, the light of the Christian shall expose darkness that comes in the forms of injustice, hate, oppression and shall be a beacon for change, showing society that there is another way! All of this must be done humbly with the grace of the true light, Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer:

Praise to You!

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!

You will come, You have come, You are coming!

Kindle in us great wonder at Your Presence in our lives.

Show us Your face in the darkness.

Shine in our hearts and give us the light of the knowledge of Your glory in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fill our hearts with Faith, Hope, and Love!