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## “Light”

A sermon by  
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Third Sunday of Advent—Lessons and Carols  
December 13, 2009

Gen. 3:8–12, 22–24; Isa. 11:1–10; Matt. 25:1–13; Lk. 1: 26–35;  
Lk. 2: 1–20; Isa. 53:1–6; Jn. 1:6–9

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There came a man,

*but it could have been a woman, or a child;*

sent from God,

*on a mission for God, commissioned by God, personally;*

whose name was John,

*but it could just as easily have been Jane, or Jim, or Joseph, or Jerry;*

He came as a witness,

*as one with personal knowledge of something,*

*attained through personal sensory experience of*

*eye, ear, nose, mouth, and skin to skin,*

*who gives evidence as fact,*

*even if it might lead to suffering, or even death;*

He came as a witness,

*as a dead man walking once he opened his mouth,*

to testify concerning the light,

*to bear witness concerning the light,*

*to make a statement based on personal knowledge or experience,*

*to “the” light, not to “a light, not to just any light, but to “the” light.*

*We witness a great deal of illumination at this time of year, it seems.*

*The Lucky Strike tower has lights on it.*

*The TV tower has lights on it.*

*The DPAC beams a spotlight straight to the stars,*

*whenever a performance is in town.*

*The downtown streets have snowflake lights at various intersections.*

*Houses are adorned on the outside with colored lights and ice cycle lights.*

*Christmas trees inside have twinkling and bubbling lights on them.*

*Storefronts are brightly lighted with tempting window displays.*

*Glitter and sequins abound.*

*The darker it gets outside,*

*the closer the earth tilts towards our winter solstice,*

*the more it seems we try to deny darkness its foothold*

*by illuminating every conceivable shadow- space.*

*But these are all examples of "a" light, not "the" light.*

John came to testify concerning "the light",

*"the" light that has as its energy source, God,*

*the light that is the garment of God,*

*that is the countenance of God,*

*that is the law of God,*

*that is the day of God, fire by day, all day, every day,*

*that is the light of the world, perfect light, inextinguishable light,*

*the light that is God-light.*

so that all might believe

*in "the" God-light, not in a light, and certainly not in John, himself,*

*but in "the" God-light.*

Because John was not "the" light at all, but only a witness to "the" light.

The true light,

*has no shadow side, no dark side.*

*I went to see the Phantom of the Opera last week,  
having never seen this icon of American theatre.  
And while I was familiar with the music  
and could sing most of it by heart  
before I ever entered the theatre,  
I was not so familiar with the story line.  
So once the lights went down, and the curtain came up,  
I wondered to myself: What is this strange story really about?  
Is it about the thin line between love and possessiveness?  
Is it about Oedipal connections that go on subconsciously  
between father-figures and daughter-types,  
or mother-figures and son-types?  
Or is it about the realization that every story has,  
what the secular world would call, a dark side;  
or what we in the Reformed Tradition call, depravity darkness,  
you know, the ring around the starched white collar,  
or the dirt under the perfectly manicured nails.  
And that every story masks its dark side, and begs for redemption.*

*Upstairs at the opera house, the stage is lavishly furnished and well-lit,  
the actors and actresses are dressed in billowing bright costumes,  
and they dance and sing brilliantly.  
The central character, Christine, is beautiful herself: apparently innocent,  
once the apple of her father's eye,  
lovingly trained in voice by someone she trusts as  
the angelic Spirit of Music,  
lovingly infatuated with a childhood sweetheart, Raoul.  
Meanwhile, just off stage, the well-lit opera company  
is going darkly bankrupt,  
the lavishly furnished opera house itself*

*sits atop a complicated underworld of dark tunnels, cages,  
rodents and waterways;  
the afore-mentioned trusted voice mentor, Erik, hides behind his mask  
a desire to possess and torture his beautiful protege,  
and even the innocent love of the two childhood friends,  
Christine and Raoul is red-tinged with more than just  
a retrieved scarf.*

*I watched, intrigued, thinking the whole time that darkness  
would be obliterated in the end;  
that true love would prevail  
and bathe the whole smarmy scene in its redemptive light.  
But it doesn't end that way. People die. Innocence is tainted.  
Hope is tentative.*

*The Phantom disappears, but his mask remains,  
only to mask other dark characters and dark corners of life.*

*And as I watched the Opera unfold, I thought to myself how every one  
of our stories has a dark side, too;  
my story, your story, each has a dark side, if we are truthful.  
Even our most notable families have underworld tunnels  
of unfaithful moments, betrayal, possessiveness,  
abuse and selfish desire.*

*Even our most brilliant athletes are handicapped by short-comings  
that are less than commendable.*

*Even our brightest Nobel peace prize winners must dabble in costly war,  
and hope well that because it is "just war", that it will usher in  
a lasting day of peace.*

*Even the Hanukkah story, with God's miraculous provision of light,  
is colored with dark sub-plots of insurrection, religious coercion,  
political oppression, and murder.*

*Even our most-decorated war heroes  
come home emotionally wounded from the traumas  
they have survived, but which others didn't.  
Even our best-guarded railroad tracks can not prevent traffic  
from trapping innocent victims in its protective snare.*

*But this Jesus, this Jesus, he will be the true light, John testifies.  
He will be the true light that illuminates all of our stories,  
and flushes out all of their dark elements, which we try to mask.  
He will be the true light that is inextinguishable, that will cast no shadows,  
that will bathe us all, every one of us, in its radiance; in God's radiance.  
He will redeem all of our stories from  
from their elements of complicated darkness.*

The true light which enlightens every person,  
*every man, woman, and child,  
every political system, every workplace, every environment,  
every church, every neighborhood, every community,  
every family, every marriage, every childhood,  
every relationship.*

The true Light, Jesus Christ, sent by God, is coming into our world.

So, keep watch. Stay alert. Keep your lamps trimmed and burning,  
that we miss not the day and hour of his dawning.

Our stories yearn for His redemption. Come into our darkness,  
our brokenness, our sickness, our fear. Come, Lord Jesus, Come. Amen.