

In the name of the Father and of the ✠Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light. It's a common theme in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the New Testament. It's a theme we hear often during the Advent season especially. Winter is a time of short days and long nights, a time when the natural light of the sun is limited, and the light of lamps, candles, and fireplaces pierces holes into the darkness. In the coldness and darkness of winter, it seems appropriate that the church begins its new year and the time of preparation and anticipation for the birth of Jesus, the Light of the world.

In the centuries before electricity illuminated churches and other buildings, candles provided the light by which congregations gathered for worship. With the invention of the incandescent light, candles became less important to providing light by which to see and took on more symbolic meanings. In fact, some theologians will offer up lengthy explanations as to why there are X number of candles in a given place in the church, and what the candles represent. The Advent wreath, a made with the traditional evergreens—including laurel, fir, spruce, cedar, and holly—is an adaptation of the pre-Christian use of the wreath and candles as a sign of the anticipation of the coming spring with brighter days and shorter nights. For us today, the candles help us mark our journey through the time of preparation and waiting for Christmas. Each week, another candle is lit, displacing a little more darkness and giving us a little more light. And, as each week passes, the candles burn down, visually marking the passing of time and the lessening of our days on this earth and the approach of the return of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. As Christmas approaches, the light becomes brighter, reaching its brightest when we come into this place in the dark of night to welcome the birth of the Light of the world, the Light which darkness cannot overcome.

It is in the light of the Lord that the Hebrew people walked as they fled Egypt for the Promised Land. Basking in the light of the Lord, the Chosen People gave thanks to God for all God had done for them. They gathered in the temple to give thanks and praise, to make their sacrifices, and to worship the one True and Living God. In time, the nations—not just the Chosen People, but all people—will come before the Lord God at the holy place, the temple mount, and praise God and serve him without question. The darkness of anger, warfare, sin, hatefulness, and deceit will be behind the people, and everyone in every nation will walk in the light of the Lord.

Warfare, disagreements, arguments, displeasure with a loved one or friend—all of these are part of the darkness of humanity. It's so easy for us to see the bad in people, rather than seeking out that which is good and right. Rather than saying to ourselves, "There is some light here, even in the darkness," we all too often declare "It's too dark to see anything." Sometimes, it just feels so good to sit in the dark and pout that we forget that we aren't children of darkness, but children of the light.

As children of God, we are called, as Paul so simply puts it, to "lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." ([Romans 13:12b](#)) Interesting choice of words Paul uses here, as "armor" is something that we generally consider to be a tool of warfare. Paul suggests that the Romans—and we, too—wake up, pay attention, and prepare for something bigger—something more important than living in the darkness of human sinfulness. Paul calls on his readers to put aside the darkness of jealousy and debauchery, wild living and a carefree, "what, me worry" lifestyle and clothe themselves—ourselves—in Jesus Christ. Salvation is at hand, Paul declares. Indeed, it is even closer now than it was when we first became believers—children of God.

We are closer to our salvation now than when we became believers because we are baptized, of course, and also because we are one day closer to the coming of Christ the King, the return of the Messiah in all of his promised glory and power and might. We know Christ is coming again. We are called to be ready for his return, even though we don't have a clue as to when it will happen. Paul and his followers thought it would be in their lifetimes, but they knew also that only God knew the actual time and place. Even so, Christians are called to live as though the time will be right now. Live as children of the light—righteously, honorably, faithfully. Don't cheat your neighbor. Don't live a "wild and crazy" lifestyle. Don't fall victim to the wiles and temptations of the darkness. Live each day and each night as the child of God that you are.

One of the basic rules of life by which I have lived is this: Integrity is doing what is expected, even when no one is watching. I've lived my life by this axiom ever since I first heard it back in high school. It's another way of saying "Let us live honorably as in the day," ([Romans 13:13](#)). It's also what Jesus was telling his disciples as well. We don't know when Christ will return, any more than we know when our house will be robbed, our car stolen, or our

funeral scheduled. Therefore, we must live our lives as Jesus has taught us each and every day. The pettiness and rowdiness of life that the secular world thinks is “living” is simply a distraction. Jesus didn’t teach that those who followed him weren’t supposed to have fun or enjoy life. To the contrary, he taught his disciples to live life and live it abundantly!

But as we live our life abundantly, we live it as children of the light, children of God and coheirs with Christ to all that God has promised to his Chosen People. We are called to live our baptism daily, to put it on like a bright white garment, radiating the Light of Christ to all the world, shining forth the message of God’s love for his creation and the peace into which all nations and all peoples are drawn.

Let us live as children of the light, shining brightly in the world as exemplars of the love of Christ which has been promised and given to all believers.