

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-3,15-16,18-20; John 1:9,14

Message: He Will Warm You

December 16, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON

Advent 3

Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

On a cold winter day, it can feel so good to sit inside by a window, with the sun shining through. Even though the outside air is cold, perhaps there is snow on the ground and ice on the river, but the warmth of the sun through the glass is so soothing.

Or perhaps the picture that you appreciate is when the sun begins to set and the sky and earth is bathed in the soft reddish glow. Everything turns colour, as if washed in the rays of the sun.

Maybe you can identify with the image of an added blanket on your bed in winter. The extra weight and warmth makes sleeping so much more comfortable than simply turning up the heat. It feels so good to be under the covering of the blankets.

Or you might be someone who enjoys being cuddled up in a warm flannel blanket. Wrapping it around your shoulders is more than protection from the cold. It is a feeling of security and comfort.

Those images come to mind as we read the first two verses of Isaiah 60: “the glory of the LORD rises upon you” and “darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the peoples,” and “his glory appears over you.”

There is the reality of the darkness of sin and its pervading presence. Like an impending storm, the gloom of evil and disobedience spreads over everything. Even as the darkness seems to penetrate everything, it also seems to become impenetrable.

Into the darkness shines the light of God’s glory. *Over* the darkness shines the light of God’s glory. *Overcoming* the darkness is the light of God’s glory.

It’s a glory that has come in the person of Jesus, as we read in John 1:9 and 14, “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world....The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory...full of grace and truth.”

“The glory of the LORD rises upon you.” Jesus, full of glory, has come to this earth. Through his life and death and resurrection, he has overcome the power of sin and death and darkness. He pushes back the darkness to bring the light of God’s presence and glory on the earth.

There is an interesting history of Old Testament imagery that is inherent in the verses

from Isaiah 60 and John 1.

We can go back to the time Moses. Moses met with God on Mt. Sinai. In Exodus 24:16 we read of how the glory of the Lord settled on Mt. Sinai like a cloud. Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. In Exodus 33:18, Moses said to the Lord, "Now show me your glory." The Lord replied that his glory would pass by as Moses is hidden in a cleft in the rock, covered by God's protecting hand. He could not see the glory of God directly.

Later in the story, in Exodus 40, the people of Israel built the Tabernacle as the central place for worship while travelling through the wilderness. When the construction was complete, a cloud settled over it. We read in Exodus 40:35, "Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

The same thing occurred at the dedication of the temple built by Solomon. A cloud came down and "the glory of the LORD filled his temple." (See 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:14, 7:1ff)

The glory of God appeared as a cloud, a covering, in the tabernacle and temple. In that cloud of glory, God expressed his presence with the people.

This glory that Moses wanted to see and that settled on the tabernacle was the glory, or the "*kavode*," of God. This Hebrew word, "*kavode*," can be translated "glory" or "weight." The picture is of the warmth and weight of a blanket settling over those who see and recognize and experience the glory of the Lord.

Then in John 1, the gospel writer makes an interesting and intentional choice of words as he speaks of the coming of Jesus: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling or tabernacled, among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only."

The intentional word picture here brings to mind the cloud of glory covering the tabernacle or temple of the past. Now that glory appears in the presence of the person, Jesus.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you." The glory of God appears in the person of Jesus. Jesus reveals God's presence with his people. From being forsaken because of sin, we come to know the Lord as our Saviour, our Redeemer (Isaiah 60:15-16).

Bear with me as we take this another step and bring in the picture from 2 Corinthians 3. After talking about the glory of the old covenant with Moses at Sinai and the wilderness

tabernacle and the glory of Jesus and the Spirit, we read that “we all, who with unveiled faces behold or reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Believing in Jesus, the light of the glory of the presence of Jesus shines in our lives. We are assured of forgiveness of sin. The darkness of guilt is overcome by the forgiveness that is ours by grace in Jesus Christ. The darkness of separation from God and condemnation because of sin is overcome by the light of glory in Christ Jesus. We are children of God! The light of grace and forgiveness shines in our lives!

Like the cloud of glory that came upon the tabernacle in the wilderness and later on the temple of Jerusalem to symbolize God’s presence with his people, so the glory of the Lord shines upon us. God is present with us, always.

“His glory appears over you.” You. Individually. The glory of the Lord is on *you!* You. Plural. Collectively, as the church, the glory of the Lord is on us, his people.

That glory of God not only overshadows us, but his glory is expressed through us. As Jesus revealed God’s glory, now we also reveal that glory of God to a world that is covered so much with darkness.

“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” Notice the shift: the light of God’s glory is now *your* light. The glory of God now shines through *you*. “You are the light of the world.... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (see Matthew 5:14-16).

God has called every one of us to shine bright in the darkness that covers the earth. God calls every one of us, filled with his Holy Spirit, to act as a light that illuminates God’s love and presence and grace to those around us.

We know the darkness that covers the earth. We’ve been naming that darkness in the last couple of weeks: the darkness of pornography and abuse and addictions and war and unforgiveness and gossip and racism and prejudice. But we are not a people of darkness. The darkness does not overcome us. We are people of light, people of glory, God’s glory. “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.”

Let our words, our actions, our whole lives shine as that beacon which draws others to a place of hope, a place of healing, a place of peace in a dark and hurting world. Let us be different than the darkness around us, not walking in the darkness of sin and disobedience,

but walking in the light of kindness, saying and doing what is right, that we draw others to the light of Christ.

Let us shine as a light, the glory of God, that challenges the darkness. The people of light are not caught in that darkness. We challenge it in our own lives with the light of Christ. We bring hope and healing to the lives of others with the light of Christ. We are confident in shining the light, for we are filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The light of God's glory has come in Christ, shines from us through the power of the Holy Spirit, until the glory is revealed in all its fullness when Jesus comes again. The picture in Isaiah 60 takes us to a future time: there will be no need of sun or moon, "for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (see verses 19-20).

Jesus said in Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels."

There is a picture revealed to John, as recorded in the book of Revelation, of a new heaven and a new earth where there is no temple "...because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it....The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it" (see Revelation 21:22-26). In these verses we hear echoes of Isaiah 60.

This picture of the glory of heaven, when Jesus comes again and makes all things right, celebrates the all-pervasive presence of the glory of God. The picture of peace and the gathering of the nations finds its ultimate fulfilment at the end of time, with the victorious coming of Jesus.

This is the Advent we celebrate: the coming of Jesus in glory, the glory shining through those who follow Jesus and become like him in glory, the coming again in glory when the glory that now rises upon us covers all things. Then there will be no darkness, ever again.

Arise! Shine! For your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. We have seen his glory in Jesus. Be transformed into ever-increasing glory that others may see and know that God is with us, and coming again.

To the praise of God!

Amen.