

The Baptism of Our Lord

January 8, 2011

John 8:12 "Flee from the Darkness and Into the Light"

Today we begin a series on the "I am" sayings of Jesus Christ. There are seven of these sayings that Jesus speaks about himself in John's Gospel, and each of them teaches us something different about our Savior. Even the phrase, "I am," reveals something about the person of Jesus Christ that distinguishes him from every other person in the world. These words take us back to Exodus where God reveals his name to Moses at the burning bush as "I am," or "I will be who I will be" or "Yahweh." These "I am" phrases teach us that it is critical that we pay special attention to the person of Jesus Christ - fully human and fully divine. Even more, these teachings show us that we must put all things in life aside and turn to Christ and follow him. Today we ponder Jesus' words in John 8:12:

¹² When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus is God's Son and the certified agent of the Heavenly Father, and we must flee from this life's darkness and enter into the light that is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World.

However, it is very difficult to leave the darkness in this life, and it is impossible without God's intervention. It was just a year ago our home was plunged into darkness during that terrible snowstorm. It seems that whenever the electricity goes off, it always goes out at night. Why can't it go off in the daytime? If the electricity goes out in the daytime, the outside light prevents our being suddenly in darkness. However, when the electricity goes off at night, suddenly you are in the dark. In our case last year, we reached into the darkness for candles, flashlights, and an emergency car battery charger as a source to light a lamp, with hope that the electric would come back on in an hour or two. However, it stayed off for days as the BGE emergency crews worked 24-7 to get everyone's power back on.

The Old Testament reading from Isaiah 60 reminds us that at creation and in Isaiah's time "darkness covered the earth and thick darkness was over the people." There were no electric power plants, electric lines, and indoor wiring for electricity to provide light. When it was night, it was dark. Only candles and fire could break the darkness. Isaiah is also writing in spiritual terms, and the reality is that thick darkness is humanity's sad state ever since humanity's fall into sin. Darkness is the absence of God. It is life without God. It is the state of the person without Christ in his or her life.

Darkness is the state in which the unredeemed live without Christ, and so it is a difficult place to live and move. You know what it is like if the electricity goes out in the evening. The initial darkness is probably the worst until the eyes adjust to the sudden change from light to darkness. When I can manually turn off a light before going into darkness, I close my eyes first to help adjust to the darkness. However, the darkness is still there, and it is difficult, or impossible, to see objects that are in your path. Likewise, it is difficult to move through life apart from the light of Christ. People might learn to adapt, but it is a long time to spend life in this world apart from the love and forgiveness God gives in Jesus Christ.

Walking through this life in the darkness of sin leads eventually to death and eternal separation from God. God told Adam and Eve that if they ever ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. They did not physically die the day they disobeyed God, but they died spiritually. They

sinned, and they were no longer holy and good and perfect. They began to lose the perfect knowledge they had when God created them in his image. They began to struggle to obey the 10 commandments that were once written on their hearts. They began to live and move in the darkness of sin.

We inherit the sinful nature of Adam and Eve, just as people pass down genetic properties to the next generation. We pass on sin and death to those who come after us, just as our parents passed them to us and just as Adam and Eve passed them to their children. We come into this life already walking in darkness, spiritually dead, and separated from God. When people continue in their lives, without faith in Christ's person and work of salvation, they come to the end of their lives, die from this world, and remain eternally separated from God. It is this eternal separation, and God's wrath, that Christ took on the cross as our substitute. However, without knowledge of what Christ has done, and without faith in Christ's work at the cross, the sinner perishes eternally apart from God. When people walk in spiritual darkness through life, it leads them further and further away from God.

Jesus Christ has come for us as the "Light of the World." This past Friday the Christian Church observed the Epiphany of Our Lord in the Church Year Calendar. This is the day when the church traditionally has the reading of the Wise Men coming to worship the baby Jesus and to when they give their presents to him of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The magi followed the light of the star to the place it rested over the home of Jesus, in fulfillment of Isaiah's words that "nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." When the magi came to Jesus, they met the Light of the World.

Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, entered the darkness of our sin and death. He did not come as a sinner as we do because he came without sin. His holy birth was the result of his miraculous conception in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit. God became flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ – holy and perfect flesh and blood, without sin. Jesus came in the perfect image of God, the same image in which Adam and Eve were created before they made the decision to sin. And when Jesus came to his own baptism by John, God spoke from heaven and said, "You are my Son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased."

It was important that Jesus be perfect so that he could keep the 10 Commandments perfectly for us as our substitute. It was also important for Jesus to be human so that he could be nailed to the cross as our offering for sin. As I stated before, he took our sin upon himself at the cross. However, when he was carrying our sin, darkness came over the earth until the time of his death. This darkness symbolized the darkness of our sins on the cross with him, along with the wrath of God for our sins directed at him in the time of his suffering for the world. When he had successfully carried our sins, he died and was buried. On the third day he rose again from the dead, and he began to show himself alive again to his disciples. Immediately, he proclaimed to them the victory he won over our sins, death and the devil.

Jesus came to bring the light of God's holiness into our world, to speak God's words of love to us, and to fill us with his light so that we could leave the darkness of this world's sin and walk in his light. All who put their trust in Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, can now walk in his light.

Isaiah writes, "Arise, shine. Your light has come." Our light has come through Jesus Christ, through whom we emerge from the darkness of sin and death and enter into light and life. Therefore, we reaffirmed our baptisms today, and thus our commitment to Christ and the Gospel. Our baptism unites us with Christ through his death for our sins and through his resurrection from the dead. Since we died with Christ, we also live with him. We have come into the light of Christ, and so Isaiah can write, "Then

you will look and be radiant, and your heart will throb and swell with joy.” You are completely made new in Jesus Christ, and so you are radiant and full of joy!

However, we must make the daily commitment to flee from the darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ, because the darkness is still around us every day. Although we have been set free from sin, the sinful nature still wrestles within us, and we are also daily surrounded with the reality of sin because we still live in the world with other people. We are surrounded by people who are trying to fit in with other people, and not necessarily with people filled with the light of Christ. Sometimes we, too, might want to fit in with people in the world who live in darkness. We must resist, flee from the darkness, and live in the light of Jesus Christ. We have received too much from Jesus to sacrifice our faith in him.

It’s not a smooth and easy road we travel in this life. There are bumps and turns all along the way in life. We deal with our struggles with sin, the sins of others, life’s disappointments, illness, death, and all kinds of things that might suggest there is no loving God. Sometimes it would be easier to give up, just as many other people have given up and turned away from Christ, and back into the darkness. Just as the electric power can go off in the evening and throw us into complete darkness, so when we allow the darkness of sin to enter our lives, we put ourselves in spiritual danger of the light of Christ going out in our own lives. The light of Christ has rescued us from the darkness of sin and death, and we must hold fast to Christ. Therefore, we must daily immerse ourselves in the light of Christ and God’s Word, back to forgiveness, and thus stay within the light of Christ.

Jesus, the Light of the World, has come. Flee from this life’s darkness and enter into the light that is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World.

soli deo gloria