

25 March 2016
Holy and Good Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Our Light in the Darkness”

Text: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 18-19; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

This is our darkness. The darkness of our sin. In the beginning, God said “Let there be light.” The darkness we have created.

It is the darkness we have created by hurtful words spoken, cutting worse than any blade. The thoughts that would make us so ashamed if anyone else knew them. The desires of our hearts that were against what we know is good and right. The destructive deeds that have erupted out of us.

It is the darkness we have created by the words we have left unspoken, that could have healed, could have helped, but we swallowed them. The thoughts of what we could do that never made it past the thought stage and into action. The deeds we didn't do . . . why? Laziness, fear, lack of care, someone else will surely do it?

I know the sins on my heart and mind tonight. What are they for you?

This is the darkness we have created. The darkness of regrets, pain, fear, fallenness, separation, isolation. It is not a good place to be.

When children are young they are afraid of the dark. We think it a childish thing; something to outgrow. But maybe they know more than we adults. Maybe we should be more like them. And fear the darkness. *This* darkness. The darkness we have created.

And yet the lone candle on the altar testifies that we are not here, in this darkness, alone. And we are not just here with each other. Jesus is here with us. Our Christ is here. Our Saviour.

The one who had no sin, no darkness, no regrets. The one from whom nothing hurtful has ever come or ever will. He is here with us. For He plunged Himself into our darkness to be with us. The Son of God was made man. But not just to be with us - to be for us. Not just to walk with us through this darkness, but to carry us through it. To give us hope. To be our Saviour from a darkness which would, without Him, quickly engulf and destroy us.

We heard it tonight from Isaiah, and then heard how He did it from John. How He was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, for us. How He took our sorrows, shame, and

grief upon Himself. How He was despised and rejected, wounded for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. He came into our darkness and took the darkness upon Himself. That it crush Him and not us. Engulf Him and not us. That it take His life, not ours. That we be forgiven.

This is the reason why He was born; why the Word was made flesh. To do this. For this dark night.

So what a happy coincidence for us that today is March 25th - the day exactly nine months before December 25th, Christmas; the day set aside to remember when the angel Gabriel came to a young virgin in Nazareth, spoke to her God's Word, and our great High Priest was conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit. Tonight is why that happened. The light of the world came into our world in the darkness of Mary's womb, and He leaves it in the darkness of death.

But by so doing, as the reading from Hebrews said tonight, ***he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him***. Obey him how? By believing this. By believing that all this He did for you. And by seeing all your sin on Him. That's what He wants.

That whatever sins hound you, you see them on Him. What regrets you have, let Him have them. Whatever struggles you're enduring, throw them on Him. Whatever doubts, fears, troubles, burdens, sorrows, failures, He came to bear them for you and set you free. For He came to take your darkness and be your light, your hope, your salvation, your sin offering.

Tonight, we get a glimpse of this darkness we live in daily, but don't realize. The darkness we daily add to as well. This candle will leave, but not for long. It will return, for the darkness cannot overcome the light. Death will not hold life. Sin will not win. Our Saviour will. He will return, He will rise, and so will we.

But for now, we still live in this darkness we have created; that we thought was better; that we choose every time we sin. The darkness of division. The darkness of terrorism. The darkness where evil is called good and good evil. And Jesus knows what it's like. For as He dwelt with us in this darkness, Jesus, as we heard, ***offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence***. But how can that be? For He wasn't saved; He died. He was crushed. It seems as if His prayers were not heard, not answered.

But they *were* heard. He was saved. He did rise from death. But He had to go through this time of darkness and death. For ***although he was a son*** - the Son of God! - he put Himself in our place - as a man - to ***learn obedience through what he suffered***. To rely not on what He saw or felt, but to rely on the words of the prophets. That this must be, so that in His resurrection, He ***become the source of eternal salvation*** for us.

So know, dear sons and daughters of God, that your prayers are heard, and your loud cries and tears precious to your Father in heaven. Though we must go through this darkness now, do not rely on what you see or feel - believe the Word. For though we die, yet shall we live. You, too, will be awakened from death and your eyes shall see the Son of God, your Saviour. And then the darkness, finally, will be no more, and you will praise Him without end.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.