



ll who believe in the name of Jesus are shaded under the branches of the tree of life which sprang from the root of Jesse. King Jesus, promised of old, worshiped now in the splendor of

His glorious mercy and great love, has reconciled the nations unto himself.

Christ became a servant to the circumcised in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. Jesus' birth accomplishes two very significant things: **1)** His Word is upheld as true, and **2)** His mercy is displayed for all the world to glorify. God's faithfulness to the Jews in His covenant promises is realized and His uncovenanted mercy is poured out on people from every tribe and tongue.

In this passage Paul quotes four times from scripture, once from the Law, once from the Prophets, and twice from the Writings. Each time, the theme is the Gentiles *glorifying* God. *God gave us mercy that we might give Him glory.* God did this through Christ's obedience, that the law might be fulfilled. Christ undid the curse and satisfied God's wrath. He fulfilled the law that we transgressed in order to make us fit to receive the promises of the covenant.

In the broader context of Romans 14 and 15, Paul is concerned that we learn to endure with our weaker brothers. He calls on God's people to live in peace and humility. Our joy and peace at Christmastime is founded on the marvelous truth that we have been graciously included in the faithful covenant of God. Our only response is to glorify, exult and *imitate* this Christ who became a servant.

Prayer: O God of all the nations, thank You that in Your Word You show Yourself to be true, faithful, and most gracious. We do not deserve to be heirs of the covenant promises You made to Abraham, but we rejoice that by the life and death of Christ You have provided for us to stand in Your grace and favor. We give you all our praise for this good work of Yours, and ask that You would fill us with the assurance, joy, and hope it brings, that we might be more fit to love our neighbors. Amen.

Romans 15:8-13:
"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing to your name.' And again it is said, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol Him.' And again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope.' May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

Psalm 43:3-5:
"Send out Your light and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise You with the lyre, O God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God."



It's almost Christmas. And you're thinking of home—even if "home" is no longer what it once was, even if mom and dad are gone, even if siblings are grown, are married, and have moved far away, even if the old place itself has been bulldozed to make way for a Wal-Mart parking lot—you're thinking of home, and sadness fills your soul, because that home, those times, those dear people, that life are gone, or at least they'll never again be known and felt and enjoyed like they once were.

The writer of Psalms 42 and 43 knew the same heart-longings for home. He was an exile, a homesick worshiper of God who longed to be home with his heavenly Father and fellow believers (43:3b). He suffered the slow agony of spiritual drought. Like a dazed and dying deer that pants for streams of water, he yearned for the heart-healing mercies of his Lord (42:1,2). That's the way it is when we are away from home: we feel vulnerable, alone, forgotten, afraid (42:3-10). Our souls are indeed "cast down." Will we never again know and feel the joy of our salvation like we did before?

Good news: God brings His children home! His light and truth guide us to His "holy mountain" where He, our joy and delight, dwells in loving and glorious majesty (43:3, 4). He does this by means of the Incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is God with us, the *light* upon the path that leads home, the *truth* of a salvation that comes by grace received by faith. Yes, even when our hearts are nearly broken with loneliness and disappointment, we know that, in Christ, we are always at home in the Father's heart, and that one day we actually will dwell at home with Him in glory. When you think longingly of life as it once was and probably will never be again, lay hold by faith of the light and truth of the Incarnate Son of God and, like the psalmist, talk tough to your cringing soul.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace and the trust in You to talk tough to my cringing soul, saying, "Why are you downcast? Why so disturbed?" I will put my hope in You and yet praise You, my Savior and my God. Amen.



As we grow in the knowledge of who God is, we grow in our confidence in Him. King David in the Old Testament, like Paul in the New, expresses unswerving confidence in the Lord. In the first four verses of Psalm 27, David tells us the reason for his confidence.

David says, *"The Lord is my light."* Why is David confident of this? Light brings understanding and enables us to see. Psalm 18:28 says, *"For it is You who light my lamp; the Lord God lightens my darkness."* David knows that God will bring him understanding to move through whatever darkness he will face. God's light reveals who He is so we can see Him and have fellowship with Him (1 John 5:5-7).

Second, David knows God is his salvation. David has seen God deliver him from his enemies and he is confident that God will continue to do so. Salvation is God's work, and we can rest in it.

Third, David is confident because God is his stronghold. A stronghold is a place of security. God is David's security.

Because God is all of these things to David, he confidently asserts, *"Whom shall I fear?"* When evildoers, adversaries, foes, and even a whole army come against him, he says, *"My heart shall not fear, though war arises against me, yet will I be confident."*

Where does David derive this confidence? David's central focus in life is to seek after the Lord, to be where He is, and to enjoy His beauty. David finds confidence in the worship of his living, protecting God, who reveals Himself by His light.

At Christmas, as we adorn our home with lights, let us remember that it is God who brings His light to adorn our hearts so we can know Him. His light will draw us into His fellowship and drive out all darkness and fear.

Prayer: Lord, be the light of my life. Drive away the fear that keeps me from trusting You with all the struggles and foes in my life. Thank You for Your presence, Your protection, and Your beauty, for they give me confidence. Amen.

Psalm 27:1-4:
*"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.
Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.
One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple."*

Psalm 119:105-106:
"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep Your righteous rules."



ne of the most profound moments in world history came when Thomas Edison's incandescent light bulbs first illumined a street in Manhattan's financial district. A new way of seeing promised to forever transform human life and culture. For the author of Psalm 119, that light is the Word of God. Like a lamp, God's Word illumines the path of the psalmist and provides a sure way for his feet to travel.

But what is God's Word, and how does it function as a light for his path? For Israelites God's Word is the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament that served as Israel's covenant charter with her God. Torah illumined the way to be truly human over and against all the darkened counterfeits of humanity in service to idols. It is this Torah-shaped obedience to the LORD that distinguishes Israel's way of being human from the nations. It is the Torah, throughout Psalm 119, that brings to the psalmist light and life. Earlier, he declares, "*I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life*" (119:93). Later he prays, "*Great is your mercy, O LORD; give me life according to Your rules*" (119:156). It is in keeping with Torah's life-giving quality that later Jewish writers came to speak of it as a manifestation of God's presence within Israel. To study Torah after the fashion of the psalmist was to be in the presence of the life-giving LORD Himself.

This seems to be the motivation behind one first-century group in particular — the Pharisees. Under Roman rule the oppressive conditions of Israel's exile persisted. For devout Jews Torah-keeping was the way to the promised life of God's future. In the midst of this darkness, however, a new way of seeing was about to break in upon the world. The Torah of Psalm 119 was about to become embodied in one man. "*The Word became flesh.*" "*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men*" (John 1:14,4). With this surprising innovation into Israel's story everything would change.

Prayer: *I long for Your salvation, O LORD... Let my soul live and praise You, and let Your incarnate Word help me. Amen.*

Week 2

Hymn: "All My Heart This Night Rejoices"

Trinity Hymnal p. 217



One of the central motifs in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, is travel. The members of the Fellowship travel over vast amounts of territory in their anti-quest toward the land of the Dark Lord to destroy his ring of power. When they tarry for rest or food they are careful to get underway quickly so that night does not overtake them. After the sun sets, the servants of the Enemy abound and danger is close at hand.

Throughout John's Gospel Jesus has been traveling on a journey marked along the way by signs that are meant to indicate the purpose of his quest. In chapter 2 water was changed to wine, in chapter 4 an official's son was restored to health, in chapter 5 an invalid was enabled to walk, in chapter 6 loaves were multiplied to feed thousands, in chapter 9 a man born blind was given sight, and in chapter 11 a dead man named Lazarus was raised to life. Echoing the six working days of the first creation, these six works of Jesus serve as signs pointing toward the journey's end, when the new creation will break forth like the dawn upon a world long darkened by evil and death.

But here in chapter 12, twilight has come upon Jesus. Soon, night must fall and the servants of the Enemy will do their worst to him. Perhaps with an eye toward the setting sun, Jesus urges his followers to remain loyal in the midst of the coming darkness. "As long as the light remains," he says, "believe in the light. Once darkness overtakes you, you'll be lost." Where Jesus goes they cannot follow. He must walk through the valley of death's shadow alone. By the end of this second creative week the darkness will have overcome the light.

But for those sons of light who dare to believe through the hours of the night, a new day will dawn—the first day of a new week—as the light of God's glorious future breaks in upon the world to make it new.

Prayer: Father of light, give us courage to serve the One who was overcome by the night for us, that we might become sons and daughters of the dawn to illumine a darkened world. Amen.

John 12:35-36a:
"So Jesus said to them, 'The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'"

Ephesians 5:8-14:
"For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"



he immense truth that Christ is the light of the world must be foundational to our thinking as we study this text, the opening words of which amazingly apply the metaphor to us: *"For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord"* (8a). We are light!

As Christians, we are light in the Lord. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *"You are the light of the world"* (Matthew 5:14a). The more luminous our integrity—our goodness, righteousness, and truth—the brighter the light. How can we shine more brightly?

A man returning from a journey brought his wife a matchbox that would glow in the dark. After he gave it to her, she turned out the light, but the matchbox could not be seen. Both thought they had been cheated. Then the wife noticed some French words on the box and asked a friend to translate them. The inscription said: *"If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light."*

We need to spend time alone with Jesus—the Light—in prayer, exposing our lives like photographic plates to His presence so that His image, His character, is burnt into ours. If we do this, we will spiritually be like Moses when he descended Sinai after being alone with God—his face shone with the light of God. We need to open our Bibles and allow God's truth to illumine our eager faces with goodness and righteousness and truth.

If you want to shine in the night, keep in the light of Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, more than anything in all the world we want You to see the fulfillment of Your work in us and in all creation, for Your glory. So we join in calling out, "Come, Lord Jesus." Amen.



entral to the Jewish worldview was the Temple, God's dwelling place on earth. In much the same way the Temple is central to the Christian worldview, but in the Christian worldview the Temple is not a building. Instead it's a spiritual house made up of living stones (Christians) which have as their foundation the Living Stone, Jesus Christ. In other words, the true Temple of God is the church, and this true Temple, where God now makes His dwelling, is built upon Jesus, the Rock (Matt. 7:24-25). He was rejected and killed by those who couldn't grasp that He was the One through whom and upon whom God's true Temple was going to be built. But in God's sovereign plan, this "stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" of the "spiritual house" where acceptable sacrifices are made to the one true God.

Not only was the Temple central to the Jewish worldview, so also was their ethnic identity as the nation of Israel. But notice that Peter says that the "living stones," (the church, which is built upon Jesus), are not only the true Temple but are also the true Israel, the true people of God. He says, "You are the chosen race, you are a royal priesthood, you are a holy nation, you are a people for God's own possession."

Through Jesus and in Jesus a whole new community is being built, and it isn't being built based on race or status or privilege. Instead, it is being built on the basis of one's trust in Jesus and His life, death, and resurrection. This is what our world needs to hear this Advent season. It needs to hear that all other "communities," whatever they may be, are mere parodies of this one true community that is founded on Jesus Christ, and it is the community where the living God makes His home.

How will they hear this message if we, the community of Jesus, the Temple of the Living God, are not proclaiming His excellencies in word and deed to the world?

Prayer: Our God, help us to realize who we are in Jesus and to live accordingly in our darkened world. Amen.

1 Peter 2:4-9:
"As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.' So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense...' But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."