



**Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA**

**Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick**

**1st Sunday of Advent- December**

**“Carrying the Light”**

**Sermon Texts: Isaiah 2:1-5/ The Gospel of Matthew 24:36-44**

**In the Nordic countries we will celebrate today at Advent Fest, they celebrate the light in the darkness. For example, on St. Lucy’s day, also known as Santa Lucia, it is said that by celebrating well, you will carry enough light to get through the long dark times of winter. It was a sign of hope. Those traditions came to this country, where a candle in the window was a common tradition with several meanings. A light shining in a window was a beacon of safety, to let travelers know that a home was a refuge. It would also light the way for visitors as they traveled to visit since neighbors lived long distances between one another. Or a family would light a candle every night for an absent family member, in hopes they would find their way home safely. Those lights drew people in hope. The story goes that a couple’s daughter left and did not return. For years, they lit a candle. They paced, they peered out windows. They listened for the key in the lock. They sat upright if they thought they heard footsteps approaching. Over the years, her absence became a part of life.**

**They never finally gave up the idea of her return, but they stopped watching for her. At first they were certain she’d be home soon, walking through that door. But eventually, they would have been surprised if she did. When you have no idea, even if you still hope deep down, it is difficult to keep watch. Eventually, years later, the daughter did return, though her mother had not lived to see it. Her father told her, “ You mother never gave up hope, I could just tell.” Life had gone on, but she had a way of glancing out a window, or coming up with excuses to not take a trip with friends. Everyone knew that deep down she didn’t want to be gone in case her daughter came back. She walked in light. You could just tell she lived in hope it would happen.**

**Long before these things, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the power of the light, saying, “Come, let us walk in the light.” The beacon of good news- of refuge, guidance, and hope for a new and restored reality. These words were spoken in a world familiar with terror and war where the vision of a peaceable kingdom was as astonishing as it perhaps seems today. Some saw a world of desperation. Others perhaps lived a heavy sigh of “That’s just the way it is.” People stopped walking in the light, much less looking. And yet, the prophet spoke a call to hope- “Come, let us walk in the light.”**

**Then it shall happen that something is going to jar the norm, something not yet fully seen. People are going about their business, trying to make it through the world. And then, a change. Or as Jesus tells us, two people are in the usual daily grind, and their paths diverge. Both Isaiah and Jesus show us that God's time is not linear. Rather, into the old, breaks forth the radical new.**

**In the midst of this dawning, we who are followers of our Lord, have the task of walking between two worlds at the same time. For this seemingly challenging task of finding our way, God beckons us to come and walk in the light. So we can find our way, and walk in hope as learn a new way.**

**Come, to learn from God, the way of peace on earth.**

**Come, walk in God's ways of peace and harmony.**

**Dare to imagine. Choose to follow.**

**The call of Advent light beckons us to ask God:**

**"Awaken us, prepare us and lead us into the light."**

**For the people of Israel, God's law, God's teaching, was the light. In a world that often celebrated violence and indulgence, God's law offered a sense of stability and purpose for the living of days. Given as a sign of God's relationship with them, and promise to be their God.**

**Reminding them that God is with them for the long haul.**

**When they walked in the light, they helped each other remember "That the God who parted the Red Sea and conquered Pharaoh's armies was sticking around for the long haul. This is not a God who liberates and leaves.**

**Deliverance...is not a one time deal." . (Rachel Held Evans, Inspired).**

**As we look at our world today, we see the same ethical and moral shortcuts available that many take all the time. We can see people living like there's no tomorrow, or as though no one who cares is watching them anyway. Yet, God promises us that a new time is coming- a time when nation will NOT rise against nation is coming. A time when peace will be real and everywhere. When no one will need to learn how to fight. (Scott Hoezee)**

**Humans alone cannot make this happen. That's the point of prophecy.**

**But we know God can and will and does.**

**Isaiah pointed to Christ. Christ points us into God's ultimate fulfillment in Him.**

**Until the new heaven and the new earth usher in a permanent walking in light, God calls us to walk by the flickering light, and usher in peace and restoration along the way.**

To live by faith in the light, just as those who heard the prophet Isaiah, and as those who heard the angels in the sky over Bethlehem, and as Jesus promised his followers- God's promised peace comes.

We cannot always see the peace of God ruling among the nations.

We can be tempted to complain or despair,  
but God calls us to live by the light, not the present darkness.

We might be tempted to become cynical or belligerent, but God beckons us with the soaring promise, and calls us to guide one another into the path of peace wherever and however we can.

We can demonstrate it in our own lives as we "Walk in the light of the Lord."

In big things and small, at work or at home, in what we do with ourselves, and our income, and everything along the way.

Walking as those who see the world around us

and also see a God-infused world as well, choosing to walk in the light.

Advent is a time to rekindle our faith and hope in Christ's return. As we walk through our daily routines and lives, may it be said that people can look at the shape of our lives and say, "They never give up hope, you can just tell."

May we be drawn to the light of Christ, and hope of God's promises, embodied in Christ.

May it be embodied in us, walking together in the light. In the words of our baptismal liturgy, "Let your light so shine, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven.

Remembering that, "There is not enough darkness in the world to put out the light of a single candle." (Robert Alden)