

Pregnant with Light

I don't know how many of you have had the opportunity to go to a place called Carlsbad Caverns but it is a place of some very, very deep caves. There was a young family who had an opportunity to take that tour and as they are about halfway through the tour in some of the darkest places in the caverns, their tour guide had everybody turn off their lights so they could get an experience of how dark being underneath the earth could be.

A little girl enveloped in such deep darkness for the first time became frightened and began to cry. Immediately was heard the voice of her brother who said, "Don't cry, somebody here knows how to turn on the lights." What a great thing for her brother to say.

You know, that's one of the things that we celebrate here today this Christmas, as we celebrate the reality of light coming into the midst of a great darkness. Not only a great darkness on the day that Jesus was born, but also a darkness in which we find ourselves in the present moment in so many different ways. St. John of the Cross, who was an incredible follower of God, a mystic, wrote a poem and the one of the last lines that poem reads, "If you want the virgin will come walking down the street pregnant with light." I love that phrase, "pregnant with light". You know when someone is pregnant they are full of life literally. In this particular poem and even in the word that we hear from Isaiah today, we hear this whole word about being full of light. That's what Isaiah proclaims when he shares that people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the shadow of death, a light has dawned and this is wonderful news; this is great news for them.

The good news for you and me is that this light is meant to be available to us in the darkness of our own lives. When we are going through, if you will, valleys of shadows of death, it doesn't necessarily have to be when the end of our life comes but shadows of death can happen in so many different ways. Like that little girl in the caverns under the earth, darkness can be incredibly dark. I don't know if you've ever been in a darkness that you could feel, but I certainly have; both metaphorically and in reality. And it can be a very, very scary thing. One of the most important things that we need to know in this kind of situations is who can be our source of light. Who can guide and lead us in some of the darkest moments of our life? A very important question. I don't know if you knew this or not, but Isaiah's prophecy that was read today in our first lesson, was actually spoken about 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. My sharing this past weekend was that there are over 300 prophecies specifically about him as Messiah. In this one in particular, Isaiah shares with us, "For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end."

I don't know about you, but in the midst of our current situation, in the reality of all that is going on in our country in terms of darkness in the world, as well as in the midst of all the violence that's occurring, all I can say is a response to that prophecy is, thank God. We not only have someone who knows how to turn on the lights, but we have someone who IS the light. It's just a matter of being willing to allow him to be that in our lives, a government of love and integrity. I think that's one of the reasons why so many people struggle with our current human forms of government. Whether they're in our own country or throughout the world is that we all know that things could be better. The government of Jesus Christ promises something infinitely better.

Turn to Isaiah and look at some of the descriptions of Jesus Christ in terms of His leadership in terms of who He is as a person. First of all, He's described as a Wonderful Counselor. If you were able to get a counseling appointment with Jesus, it would be quite an experience! That would be wonderful! It would be awesome! He might say some things to you that would be really encouraging. He might bring to light some things for you that you didn't want to see, but overall an incredible experience. But this idea of Wonderful Counselor also communicates the idea of someone who counsels wonderful things. One of the things about Jesus is he knows our future; he knows what is going to come to pass; He even knows what our best next step is. So that's what this is communicating. The whole idea of someone who is able to share with us the blessings and the opportunities that are uniquely ours in Him, if we will but walk in His light and follow Him and listen to Him. Mighty God; a divine king of wisdom and strength. What this communicates is the idea that Jesus is the ruler; the ultimate ruler of all spiritual and earthly powers. Powers that you and I can see; powers that you and I cannot see. He is the ultimate ruler over them all. Again, it's important for us to have a relationship with Him that is living in real if we ever hope to begin to address the depth of the things that we are facing, both spiritually and in the natural realms.

Everlasting Father. He will be your Father for all of eternity if you let Him. A compassionate provider and protector for you throughout all of your eternity, through all of your existence.

Finally, Prince of Peace, as I prepared for our time together today, this has been the one description of Jesus that has just been standing out to me, given our present moment. I don't know if you knew this or not, but in the Old Testament, the word for 'peace' is 'shalom'. That word 'shalom' communicates the idea of not just a peaceful moment or peaceful experience, or peaceful day or peaceful walk along the Gulf Coast, or peaceful meal with somebody that you love. Rather that word 'shalom' communicates the idea of a peace that is all pervasive. A peace that would envelop you intellectually, emotionally, physically, spiritually, relationally. A peace that is so deep that it would literally fill every cell within your body. That is a great peace. That is the kind of peace that He wants to bring us into and that emanates from Him.

One of the things about Jesus is wherever Jesus shows up truly, peace breaks out. You know if you and I really want to know what peace is about, if people really

want to find peace; in Ferguson and in New York City, in the Middle East, in their homes and in the relationships, I would submit to you that the first person we should be sitting down with is the Prince of Peace. He knows ways to peace that you and I can't even begin to see. He knows things that you and I need to do in ways that we need to step out in, that would bring about peace in very powerful, substantial and undeniable ways. I think one of the things that is important for you and I to realize in our world in the midst of all that is going on, is that Jesus, this Prince of Peace, this Prince of Light, has no part of the world's darkness. He is not a part of the violence; is not about murdering people; is not about the gossip and the trickery; he has nothing to do with greed or dictatorship; is all about peace, love, and grace. There's a reason why the Scripture says, "**God is love and that's because God is love.**" Don't make it more complicated than it is. It's much simpler than you and I realize. God is love. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He has absolutely nothing to do with the darkness of this world. What he has to do with it is to overcome. It is all about overcoming it through His church, the Kingdom of God here on earth.

As I near the end of my message, I have a question for you and me that I think is a very important question on this Christmas Day. As we approach the beginning of a whole new year, "Do you want to be a part of His light? Do you want to be a part of His peace?"

Let me share with you as I asked this incredible question. This is like the turning point of my message, by the way; this is the crescendo moment.

I'm at this moment last night at 5 o'clock service; it is just jam-packed. Kids are screaming and yelling, it is just incredible. I asked this question. All of a sudden from the back row, this kid in response to this question yells loud enough for everybody to hear. "NO!" There was about five minutes of nonstop laughter! I asked the kid to reconsider. No deal. And I didn't pay him to do that.

Thank God for the Holy Spirit in that moment for my response because one of the things I mentioned was in response to him is that you know what, there are so many people who throughout time have said "No" to Jesus. I'm asking you here today, maybe for some of you who don't really have that may be more personal intimate relationship with Jesus, kind of come here today on Christmas as part of a family. I'm asking you here today, would you be willing to consider in this New Year, to move in a new direction and to be more fully part of the light? I ask all of you who are the beloved of God who have been following him will been faithful to him, who are here week-end and week-out...who are faithful to the Lord. I want to ask you are you willing along with me to move even more deeply in his light and what that means for you and me. You know, what does it mean for you and me to follow Him more deeply as the Prince of Peace? What does that look like for you and me in a concrete relationship? Or maybe in a family situation, or may be in our work or wherever you may find yourself right now. What does it look like for you to fully bend your knee before Him to surrender to Him as the Prince of Peace and say, "Prince of Peace what would you have me do in the

situation?” “I've been waiting for you to ask me that. I want you to just keep your mouth shut and not stoke the argument, or I want you to pray for this person. I want you to have mercy on them.” That's the way to peace. Or, “I want to be firm. I want to stand up and be a witness for me and my love and just wait for them to come around”. And you see that's what it means for you and I to begin to walk with the Prince of Peace. It means that we are prayerful. It means that we are waiting. It means we allow Him to direct and guide our lives in a way that is more peaceful and loving. Believe me, at least in my brief experience in doing this, He is very creative in terms of how He can bring about peace.

What would it look like for you and me to surrender to this Prince of Light, to more fully, in the coming of this new year, to be honest about the sin that has had a hold of us; like a monkey on our back and won't let go? And begin to pray into that, begin to say, “You know what Lord? I think this thing just has kicked me up one side and down the other. It has me beaten, Prince of Light. Will you please guide me more fully into your life? Would you bring your light more fully into the darkness of my heart? Obviously, there's a darkness here. Obviously there's a sin here in my life that needs your light. Would you please come through another person, through something I read, through being in worship here in church? I'm inviting your light more fully into my life.”

Do you want to be a part of His kingdom? You want to be a part of His light and His peace beloved? There is an outbreak of darkness right now. You just have to be blind not to see it or feel it. It is just scary. People are losing their lives in this outbreak of darkness in Ferguson and in New York, and in the Middle East and other places. It's going to get darker. The Lord is reaching out to us on Christmas day. He is reaching out to you. He is saying to you, “Will you partner more deeply with me? Will you come underneath My Lordship in your life? Will you surrender to Me in a way that easily is even greater for you and be a witness to My light? Be a witness to My peace; be willing to turn the other cheek. Follow Me that I might lead you, that you might be My arms, that you might be My embrace, that you might be the vessel of My love. That you might be the vessel of My light into these incredibly dark and broken situations that My kingdom would break forth.” That is God's word to us. It is your choice. It is very powerful, the choice that you make at this moment. Choose well my friends, CHOOSE WELL.

In closing, John of the Cross shares, “If you want, The Virgin will come walking down the road pregnant with the holy and say “I need shelter for the night. Please take me inside of your heart. My time is so close.” Then under the roof of your soul, you will witness a sublime intimacy. The Divine the Christ, taking birth forever as she grasps your hand for help. For each of us is the midwife of God. Each of us, yes there under the dome of your being, does creation come into existence eternally through your womb dear pilgrim. The sacred womb in your soul as God grasps your arms for help, for each of us is his beloved servant never far. If you want, the virgin will come walking down the street, pregnant with light and sing.

My prayer for each one of us as well is that we would say, “Yes” to our Lord in His light, in His peace in a way like we never have before. That it would fill our hearts with a song, with a new song, a song of joy, a song of hope, a song of light that overcomes the darkness. A song of believing, a song of rejoicing in the tents of the righteous for our Redeemer has come; the King of Kings and the Lord of lords, the Almighty's Messiah is the one that we serve. Amen! Amen! Amen!

Fr. Joe Maiocco