

Jesus the Light of the World John 9:1–16

John 9:1 *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.*

John 9:8 *The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰ So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”*

John 9:13 *They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them.*

Jesus is the light of the world. Advent celebrates that light.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Advent is the beginning of the church calendar each year. Deaconess Betsy Karkan at Concordia University-Chicago writes this at the website lutheranreformation.org:

From the Latin word for “coming”, Advent is a time of preparation and anticipation for the coming of Christ both in the past in His incarnation as the baby Jesus, but also in the future with His promised second coming as Christ Triumphant. Furthermore, Advent is a time to focus on His present coming to us in the Word and Sacraments. In the Lutheran church there have been many traditions observed during Advent that help Christians to both prepare for and anticipate His coming at this time. Martin Luther encouraged families to observe Advent as a time for them to teach their children about the coming of Christ.

All of us, not just children, need that message of promise, hope, joy, and light. Let's not kid ourselves how much we need what Advent promises. Consider with me for a moment the darkness.

I'm not a news junkie. I catch some CBS news on the radio when I'm driving to work in the morning. I scan my BBC app as bedtime reading each evening. And I do have to check the Babylon Bee. But even not following the news closely, one is still aware of heinous crimes like store lootings, tragedies like the couple dozen migrants who perished in the English Channel a week and half back, the COVID death toll, the rise of new variants, inflation fears, political turmoil, climate change fears, drought worries, flood events, wars like in Ethiopia, starvation like in numerous places, heartbreaking small business closures, runaway medical costs, and I'll stop with that list of a dozen or so.

And consider our personal lives. There is so much darkness within and among us. One of the great things about heaven is that we won't need a confession of sin every time we gather for worship. God knows we are grateful that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But how we long for an end to the darkness of sin that stains each and all of us. How true rings the message in that old hymn¹:

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide;
 What can avail to wash it away?
 Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,
 Whiter than snow you may be today.

We need Jesus' cleansing blood. For we have the stain of sin, even though most people think they're going to heaven. I like what the pastor Sinclair Ferguson said: "Thinking that I deserve heaven is a sure sign that I have no understanding of the gospel."²

We could consider our relationships. There is so much darkness between people. This time of the year often highlights loneliness, family tensions, grief, shattered dreams, and another year of things not resolving in a marriage, with a child, with extended family, with a neighbor or boss or co-worker.

¹ The hymn is "Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord."

² Quoted in Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 11.

But Advent is upon us. There is a light. That light beams brightest in juxtaposition to this present darkness. John's Gospel captures the juxtaposition perfectly in a mere verse-and-a-half of our Gospel reading. In John 9 we get Jesus' own affirmation of the light. And then we are brought face to face with the world, our world, a world of trauma and conflict and mud.

Here's that amazing verse-and-a-half riff. I refer to vv. 5 and 6:

Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
Having said this, he spit on the ground."

There's more to the narrative than that, and I'll come back to it. But let's think about this. Jesus, the light of the world. At Advent, so many light images come to mind, including ...

... the Isaiah prophecy: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

How about the wise men: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

And think of the shepherds: "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were sore afraid."

The word light occurs 246x in the Bible. God is light, John writes, and in him is no darkness whatsoever.

Yet in God's Word you find darkness 174x, death 442x, wrath 212x, Hades-hell-Sheol 88x, and destroy/destruction 359x.

On the one hand there is Jesus who declares he is the world's light. But on the other there is Jesus who in making that light known in this darkness spit on the ground.

Theologians talk about creation, revelation, incarnation, election, justification, mortification, expectation--but expectoration? I've heard sermons that Jesus wept, but never that he spit.

With the saliva, the Bible says that Jesus made a mud plaster. He daubed it on the face of the man born blind. He thereby restored his sight.

The healing dramatizes anatomically that Jesus is the light. He brought sight where there was darkness. This fits in with a whole sweep of dazzling messianic acts which the Gospels record. To name just some:

Jesus brought a saving message to Jews mired in sectarian confusion, like sheep without a shepherd.

He brought the knowledge of God to Gentiles in their polytheism, without God and without hope in the world.

He brought forgiveness of sins to the guilty and mobility to a paralytic.

He cleansed lepers, both the one who thanked him and the other nine who didn't.

He cast out demons.

Jesus called disciples, something rabbis of his era did not do.

He proclaimed himself Lord of the sabbath. He healed and performed other miracles on the sabbath to prove it.

He taught in parables.

Jesus calmed a storm, healed a woman who had bled for 12 years, fed 5,000, walked on water, fed 4,000, at just age 12 outdueled the doctors of theology, gave hearing to the deaf, and told the teacher of Israel that he needed to get saved! "Unless you be born again you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven," Jesus said to Nicodemus.

Jesus foretold his own death and resurrection, then appeared in blinding light with Moses and Elijah and the divine heavenly glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. On that occasion he actually glowed.

Immediately after this heavenly exaltation as he trudged off the mountain he had pity on a truly hapless dad who had a little son. Dad brought his boy to the Lord to save him. But the son had a reaction to Jesus due to spiritual oppression. It seems there was a spirit in the boy. This spirit "convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth."

I wonder if people wondered whether Jesus had a handle on this one. His disciples had not been able to cure the boy. Jesus himself asked, "How long has this been happening to him?" As if maybe he's stumped too.

The answer from the dad was chilling. "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly forming, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse. Most of the bystanders said, "He is dead." Perhaps they were right.

But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

Healer of sickness. Master of spirits. Consoler of the demoralized. Lord of circumstances. Deliverer from Death. Light in this darkness.

Scholars point out that the spitting in John 9 was an accepted exorcistic technique of that era and locale. If Jesus appeared in this service, you might expect a coat and tie, or maybe business casual. In the first century, as prophet and healer and anointed one, he reflected the social conventions of his setting, like making mud so that at the testimony of public washing blind eyes might see.

But to me the spitting is also a confession, a statement about what is most certainly true. Beneath our feet is dirt. From it we came. To it we will return. With its resources, like the food the earth yields and the ground we stand on, we do God's work.

The light of the world did not disdain the dirt of the world. He did not hover fastidiously above it and lob truth packets to the lost. He inhabited this world suffering the curse of sin. As we sing in "O Come All Ye Faithful,"

God of God, Light of Light
Lo, He abhors not the Virgin's womb

Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us, from blessed conception to babyhood and beyond. Those who beheld it never forgot: God stooped to become one of US! There's a Hebrew word for that: Immanuel.

The spitting is a reminder. Until the Lord comes we are earthbound. We are finite. We are bounded by things we lament. Our hope is not yet seen. We walk by faith and not by sight in all kinds of ways. Jesus' light gives us hope and faith but seldom if ever the final resolutions we may seek.

Jesus felt the frustration of our limitations too. There's a verse I left out of the story we just heard of Jesus healing that little boy with an unclean spirit. After Jesus was told that his disciples had not been able to help the boy, he exclaimed: "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me" (Mark 9:19). In this age Jesus' faltering followers are often as dumb as the dirt from which God made us.

But we're talking Jesus. I doubt anyone here questions Jesus' perfect and eternal light. I trust I don't. But the ambivalence of this dim world despite Jesus' visitation was demonstrated on Thursday, September 29, 2011. It is a day I will never forget due to the bad memory it left me with.

I had just given a lecture at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. It was about 2:30 in the afternoon. A seminary student named Brandon Van Marel and I were languishing by the admin building parking lot in the warm fall sun speaking of pleasant things.

Suddenly came a commotion and shrieking.³ A 13 year old boy named Brandon Hsueh was running with his school's cross country team along the sidewalk nearby when he inexplicably stumbled. He lurched into the roadway. He was struck by an SUV. It was the driver of that SUV who was shrieking. She had no time even to hit the brakes. For months afterward you could see the green spray paint marks made by investigators on the pavement.

Brandon died the next day. His father was Dr. Eddy Hsueh, chief of general surgery at St. Louis University Hospital. Brandon donated several of his organs, including his heart, lungs, kidneys, pancreas and liver to help others, his father said. He told a reporter "My son has really made me proud by probably saving more lives than I will."

Those were brave words, positive words. But I'll bet that father will grieve his lost

³ https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/article_ce285af0-eb77-11e0-83c0-0019bb30f31a.html. Accessed Nov. 28, 2021.

son as much this Christmas as every other Christmas over the last ten years.

Life--but death. Light--but such darkness. Human existence is a gift and a vapor and a mystery. Even Christ was here under one Caesar and gone under the next. A servant is not greater than the master.

In John 9 as Jesus spoke of himself as light, he urged his disciples to work while it was still day because night does come. And to show us the way, he spit and got his hands dirty and worked the miracle of salvation symbolized by giving vision to a man blind from birth.

Jesus said while I am in the world I am the light of the world.

By his Spirit and among us his followers he is still here. We share his light. We bear his light.

At Advent we celebrate the light all the more because he has called us not only to a heavenly fellowship of joy, but also to a real-time earthy communion of toil and soil and often sorrow and service sometimes with mud under our fingernails. And this is in no way, even dimly, to rival the sole sacrifice he made by his death ... but only so we too might join the saints through the ages in both the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

And so in Jesus' light we see light. God sent his light when he sent his Son. Jesus wept over Jerusalem yet made wine for revelers from water. Scripture says to rejoice in the Lord Jesus always, and it repeats that command.

And so we do rejoice this PM/AM in his light, a light of eternal hallelujah joy ... yet also of maranatha longing: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." May God receive our praise for the light he sent, not so that we might deny the darkness or evade it but so that we might embrace that light which overcomes all darkness with the grace, joy, and excitement of Advent.

Where does this all lead? What will life look like when all darkness has been destroyed? The last chapter of the Bible tells us. Look and listen for the light:

Rev 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of

the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Look, listen, and long for Christ the light. Amen and amen.