

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“The Light Shines in the Darkness”**

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“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

The future is dark. By that I mean the future is uncertain. It’s inscrutable, unpredictable. We’ve always lived in that kind of darkness, but it seems that uncertainty has gained ground the past couple of years. Think of all the unknowns we are contending with.

How long is this pandemic going to last? Will there be more mutations that are far more dangerous? Will we have to go into lockdown again, and if we do, what will that do to the economy? To your business? To your church? Your family? Your physical and mental health?

The future is uncertain. What about Russia? Will they invade Ukraine, and if they do will that Russian bear finally be sated and content? And what about China and Singapore?

Or global warming: are we really at the brink of no return, or have we already passed it, as some say. Or is it all overblown?

There’s so much uncertainty. Now, some have strong opinions about all these things, and for them there’s no uncertainty at all. For some, I think being dug in and unbending is an easier way to live. They’re mostly just bluff and bluster, all hat and no cattle.

If we’re honest, the future is dark to us all. We are the blind leading the blind. We grope about, not knowing what’s ahead. And it’s a fearful thing, not knowing what we’re going to stumble into.

When I was a vicar, my supervisor was telling me the importance of communication in the church. Especially when there are any changes, be sure to address all the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” questions. “Be as transparent as you can” he said, “because when people don’t have all the information, they tend to assume the worst.” That’s very true, isn’t it. When we don’t have all the information, we tend to assume the worst.

The future is dark. We don’t have all the information. That makes the future scary.

However, there are some things we can know about the future with a certainty, because the light shines in the darkness.

John tells us about this light. *This* light is eternal; it’s been shining forever. It’s one with the Father from eternity. He is the One through whom all things were made. “Without him was not anything made that was made” (v. 3). “Light from light,” as we say in the Creed. He illuminates creation by speaking the sun and moon and stars into existence. He illuminates us by speaking what He hears from the Father. Jesus said, “The Father who sent me has himself given me . . . what to say and what to speak” (Jn. 12:49).

So Jesus spoke the truth about us, because God is truth. He revealed how deeply all mankind has fallen into sin. He said things like “Anyone who commits sin is a slave to sin, and the slave does not remain in the house forever. But the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

His listeners knew what He was talking about, and they didn’t like it. They knew Jesus was saying no one can save himself, but can only be saved by Him, God’s Son. This kind of message did not sit well with the people of His day. “The world did not know him” John writes. “He came to his own” (God’s own chosen people), and his own people did not receive him.” In fact, they snuffed Him out. They extinguished him. Or at least they thought they did. But the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

“We have seen his glory” John writes. He’s not referring just to the miracles of Jesus or His Transfiguration, or to the blinding glory of Easter morning. He’s thinking of the glory manifested on the cross, His suffering and death for us. That’s where His glory really shone. Philippians 2, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God

exalted him to the highest place.” God’s glory was manifest in Jesus throughout His ministry, but especially on the cross.

What good does it do? Our text says, “To all who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” So, salvation comes by faith in Jesus. No one can claim anything within themselves that merits salvation. Luther writes, “However good or rich it may be, or however much of it there may be, it contributes nothing toward becoming a child of God” (AE 22:90). The right to become children of God comes from God alone. He’s the One who adopts us to be His children; we don’t get to adopt Him to be our child. 1 John 3, “See what kind of love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason the world did not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (v. 3).

The future is dark. It’s unknown to us. But Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8). That’s all we really need to know about the future, right? Not everything that is going to happen to us, but the fact that He will be there for us and with us. That means, no matter what you face in life, no matter what your pains or your struggles or griefs, you can have peace and hope and joy in Jesus Christ. Jesus will be there with all the love and power, and love of God.

In fact, maybe it’s all grace that the future is so dark to us and inscrutable. Maybe that’s the best thing the future can be. For if we knew what the future held for us, we might not have the courage to face it. So thanks be to God, He has shrouded it from our curious eyes. Thanks be to God, He has made it clear no one should try to know the future by means of horoscopes or fortune tellers or other occult practices. He detests such things. Thanks be to God, it is enough to know that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, owns the future even as He has laid claim on us.

As we grope our way forward among so many uncertainties, this certainty sustains us along the way. It is enough to know He has forgiven us. It is enough to know that whatever else may come, however worse it may get, the light has come and will come again. In fact, right now, He is preparing a home for us in which there is no darkness. Revelation 21, “The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. . . Its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there” (Rev. 21:22ff). With evil vanquished once and for all, there will be no need for security measures.

For now, the future is dark and uncertain. But with God’s help, we can endure the future. Then, when Christ comes again: no more darkness, only light. Thanks be to God.