

“Enlightened and Encouraged” John 1:6-8, Isaiah 61:1-3; 1 Thess. 5:23-24 Advent3B 12-17-2017

Already, we have been emphasizing joy, but what brings us lasting joy that overcomes life’s big and little disappointments? Let’s look at our three texts again in reverse order of where they appear in the Bible.

Paul’s letter to the Thessalonian Christians was that of a father to his children to motivate them to walk in their newfound faith. He wants them always to rejoice, pray, give thanks, embrace good and reject evil. Do you do that? Sometimes yes but too often no? Me too.

We need encouragement. It is more than cheerleading, consoling. It is the very thing that makes people courageous and confident to face anything that might cause us to complain and turn from prayer and not rely on God.

Paul gives that encouragement by reminding them that God is faithful to them. He will keep them blameless so that they can be courageous and confident right up to the day the Lord returns.

But courageously believing God is with us requires also enlightenment. We need to know why we can be so confident. When our son was four, we went to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. We had to descend into it on a winding path. As we drew nearer, he became more aware of the darkness ahead of us, and took much coaxing so we could continue down the path. That would scare anyone who wasn’t aware that there was artificial light in the cave to lighten our path.

If we are not enlightened that our light in the darkness, Jesus Christ, has come into the world, we would not be very encouraged about facing life. John’s Gospel calls Him the Word made flesh. And Psalm 119 calls the Word of God *a lamp for our feet and light for our path*. It instructs us in the way to go.

But Christ as the Light to which John the Baptist pointed people does more than tell us how to live. He gives us life forever. He also gives us faith to receive that light. We know this from two things John revealed about Jesus after he convinced his questioners that He was not the Messiah. Though he wasn’t what they expected, God did send him to enlighten them about why Jesus came in the world.

First, John that Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. The Jews would see this as a reference to the Day of Atonement. The High Priest lay his hands on the head of a goat, confessing over it all the sins of the people. Then it was led out into the wilderness and released.

In his baptism of repentance by John, Jesus became the scapegoat, being held accountable for the sins of the world. The Holy Spirit then led Jesus into the wilderness. For forty days, the devil failed to tempt him to sin. In remaining sinless, He encourages us to resist the devil with the light of His Word. More importantly, He give us confidence that He was a perfect sacrifice for us when he took away our sins on the cross.

Being enlightened to that truth, we are encouraged in our failures that God does not hold our sins against us. We confess them and pray that God further encourage us to rejoice, pray and give thanks.

Secondly, later we learn that God instructed John that the one upon whom the Spirit would descend when baptized was the Messiah. Being full of the Spirit, He would baptize all who receive water baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Takes us to Isaiah’s prophecy. After Jesus read it one Sabbath in a Nazareth synagogue, he announced that he was the fulfillment of that prophecy. The Spirit he received in His baptism and gives us in ours, is a Spirit that brings good news and comfort to poor sinners, binds up broken hearts, liberates those captured and condemned by their guilt.

The Spirit of God enlightens us that the Lord’s favor has come, and that instead of mourning we can look forward to His coming with great joy. For by His mercy, He has adorned with the righteousness of God that covers our sin and makes us worthy to stand before the Lord.

Now have courage to live a faithful life, not because we are generally hopeful and optimistic people. Our courage does not derive from our will power or positive attitude. We are encouraged because we are enlightened to the specific truth that Jesus, the Light that has come into the world, is our Savior. With the His Spirit we rejoice, pray and give thanks, Always. Amen.