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Scripture Text: Isaiah 9:1-7

Sermon Title: *The Need for a Savior: Light in the Darkness*

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The Need for a Savior: Light in the Darkness

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah, chapter nine, reading verses 1-7. Today and through Christmas Day, as the Lord continues to lead, we will think about the significance of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, as the Savior of the world. This morning we will consider a Messianic passage from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was a major prophet who spoke God's word to a "deaf and blind" people (6:10), who refused to heed God's warning of impending judgment that would come by means of the powerful Assyrian Empire to the north. Preaching sometime between 740-700 BC, Isaiah gives amazing prophecies about events that were to take place for successive generations. He also gave us great passages about the Servant of the Lord, verses that are most perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Today I will read the first seven verses of Isaiah 9, which are part of a message given to Ahaz, a wicked king of Judah, who refused to heed warnings about judgment that God would bring through the invasion of the Assyrian army from the north. In the context of this message of judgment, Isaiah gives this great prophecy about Messiah, who will be the perfect king of Judah and Israel, following all the other failed monarchies and a time of deep darkness throughout the land. This interlude of hope and prophecy of victory through God's Messiah is not unlike the worship and victory interludes we have in the Book of Revelation.

Follow as I read **Isaiah 9:1-7**.

This past week, on December 3rd, thousands of spectators in New York City's Rockefeller Center "ooded and aahd" as 78,000 lights were turned on to illuminate the 8-ton, 72 foot (nearly 23 meters) tall Norway Spruce Christmas tree. Decorations and Christmas lights are some of the things we enjoy during the Christmas season.

The first Christmas artificial lighting is said to have been in 1882, when Edward Johnson electrically lit a Christmas tree with tiny light bulbs in New York City, USA. Since that time, strands of Christmas lights have grown into color strings of Christmas lights in all shapes and sizes, utilized by millions of holiday lovers during the Christmas season. Before Mr. Johnson, Christmas trees were lighted by candles, which no doubt, were a worse fire hazard! According to legend, the great reformer, Martin Luther, in the 1500's cut a fir tree and decorated it in his house with candles, to the delight of his children. Lighting at Christmas had its origin in the pagan Roman Winter Solstice festivals, much like the origin of the use of evergreen cuttings.

Whatever the origin of various Christmas traditions, we as believers and followers of Jesus can seize the opportunity to "Christianize" these things. Even things such as the lighted star on a Christmas tree now for us represents the light of the Christmas star that guided the Magi to Jesus. And we can teach our children that the Christmas tree represents the cross on which Jesus died as our Savior. The red colors of Christmas also can represent the blood of Jesus shed for our sins.

This past week there was quite a stir in Olympia, Washington, USA when a group of militant atheists parked a large sign in the middle of a Nativity scene. The message on the sign essentially warned the public not to be duped by anything as superstitious and mythical as the Christian faith and its Christmas message. And the founder of this group, who was offended that his sign was removed from the Nativity scene, argued that Christians had stolen the celebration of Winter Solstice from the pagans of the first century! He said that Christianity had intruded upon a perfectly good festival and had corrupted it with all these Christian applications to the meaning of the greenery and the lights, etc. The truth is, the Christian message hasn't just intruded the pagan world. The good news of Jesus, his birth, life, death and resurrection has invaded the world and changed it forever. God has invaded the world through the birth of his Son!

Our Scripture text is vivid in its use of light in speaking of the coming of Messiah into a world of contrastingly deep darkness. Whether or not you have Christmas lights within or upon your house this season, I pray that you will join with me in trying to "see the true light" that Jesus Christ can give us in our world of spiritual darkness.

Our text tells begins by speaking of the light of God coming into...

➤ The land of deep darkness

In our text, Isaiah refers to the people of Israel, “Galilee of the Gentiles,” as walking in a land of darkness. A more literal rendering of verse two reads, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a *land of deep darkness*, on them a light has shined” (English Standard Version). In 734 BC, Galilee was a dark place, yet the people living there were not aware of the darkness. Politically, materially and socially things seemed to be in fairly good shape. So, what did the prophet mean by the people’s walking in darkness?

- *The meaning of darkness*

Darkness is defined as merely the absence of natural, created light. Natural light is defined scientifically as something like electromagnetic radiation, traveling at a speed of about 186,000 miles per second, producing a visual sensation. But the absence of this phenomenon is not what is meant by the prophet. He’s writing about a spiritual and moral darkness that was true in his time, and that is true also in our time. Israel and Judah, both the northern and southern kingdoms of the people of God, were living in unfaithfulness to the covenant the Lord had established with them and their kings. They had fallen into idolatry, adopting the practices of their pagan neighbors. And because they had forsaken God, he, like Paul says in the New Testament, simply gave them over to their corrupt ways, which were bringing about self-destruction as well as the breakdown of society. And also, the wealthy people of Galilee and Judea had become oblivious to the needs of the poor. So the land was beset with idolatry, immorality and indifference. Israel had become a land of darkness, perhaps “a darkness that could be felt” (Romans 1:18-31; Exodus 10:21). (See “darkness” and “light” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, pages 192f and 509ff, edited by Ryland, Wilhoit and Longman).

- *People walking in darkness*

The Egyptian plague of darkness, one that simply led to a further hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, was one that could be felt by all the people of Egypt. This was more than an absence of natural light, such as what is called when large cities lose their electrical supply, a “brown-out.” This is the eerie sense of all that is usually associated with darkness—ignorance of spiritual truth and shameful, immoral behavior, by individuals in a society turned morally putrid.

Perhaps you sense that kind of overwhelming darkness which takes over when the presence of God is so strikingly absent. Last winter, as the days were becoming shorter and the weather colder, I was conversing with a young merchant in our village. She confessed to me that she is afraid of the increasing darkness of wintertime. I sensed that she wasn’t talking about being afraid of the increased possibility of crime or lost business, but was revealing her own inner insecurity and likely depression. I gave a simple word of the hope, joy and peace that we can find in Jesus.

You have sensed, or rather, felt the darkness of God's absence in the workplace or wherever there is a stark absence of anything or anyone godly. Remind you, this was the kind of world into which Jesus was born 200 years ago. Even "organized religion" had lost its life into dead formality and legalism. So blind and resistant to the truth was the religion of the Jews, the religious culture into which Jesus was born, that that religious institution orchestrated the arrest, trial and crucifixion of the Savior.

We're all aware of the religious darkness that exists in so many places. Walking into beautiful church buildings, that were originally built by the devotion and sacrifice of believers, are now more like cold, damp museums and historical sites. And we know how so many in the established churches have abandoned worship attendance and the mass because they have no concept of a personal relationship with God. We are also aware of the resultant moral slide in this country that follows the abandonment of faith. We see the continuing disappearance of marriage and family as intended by God for a stable culture as well as personal emotional health. But these conditions appear not just in Belgium. We are seeing evidence of similar spiritual and moral darkness creep over many other nations, my own included.

And Jesus came into such a world of darkness. As we noted with the ESV translation of verse two: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in *a land of deep darkness* (italics mine), on them a light has shined." This was the right timing of God, the "the fullness of time," as Paul says (Galatians 4:4), when God sent forth his Son, born of a woman. And it was those who admitted their spiritual blindness to Jesus who received his light and insight of faith (John 9:35-41). So, we don't despair that we live in a spiritually dark place. Jesus loves those in darkness, and has come to seek and to save them. I was reminded this past week of my need to see people more like Jesus sees them, in the depth and helplessness of their need and their spiritual blindness. The people around you, and perhaps some who would oppose or even persecute you, are dupes of Satan, and in the grip of the kingdom of darkness. Their lifestyle may not be flagrantly immoral, and they may even be good, friendly, congenial and helpful people. But outside of Jesus, they are dwelling in a land of deep darkness. So, rather than feeling depressed when I sense this darkness, I must be stirred with more of the compassion of Jesus to reach out to unsaved neighbors, like the one who died recently, whose family seems to be without real hope.

➤ **The Light shone in the darkness**

How amazing, that Isaiah was so confident that the Light would shine through the coming of the Savior, the Messiah, that he spoke with the "prophetic perfect," as though it had already happened! Notice, these words were written over 700 years before Christ, and yet Isaiah had such assurance that these prophecies will be fulfilled that he speaks of them as have been completed (See Geoffrey W Grogan, page 73, volume 6, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

- *The birth of the Light of the World*

Isaiah prophesied about the coming of a child who would become God's ideal, David-type king that would fulfill the hopes and expectations of his people. Certainly Ahaz was a disappointing king. Isaiah had earlier told Ahaz that a sign would be given him of God's deliverance from enemy nations. The sign to Ahaz would be a child born to a young woman whose name would be Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). This had an immediate fulfillment for Ahaz and the nation. But as we know from the New Testaments reference to this verse (Matthew 1:23), this child prophesied was our Messiah, Jesus, born of the Virgin, not just a young woman as in Isaiah's time. The Hebrew word, "alma" can mean simply a young maiden or it can refer to a young virgin, signifying that Messiah would indeed be born of the Virgin Mary, as we know from Luke and Matthew's accounts of Jesus' conception and birth.

Isaiah is fond of using the child image of Messiah and of the messianic age (See John N Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, Chapters 1-39, Page 241, NICOT). Isaiah is not referring to a child king, but rather to a divine King, who will become a man. His birth indeed will be remarkable, of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). And as God's Child he is greater than any of Israel's kings, who all failed to live up to expectations. So, the child image is one that features the way God works through human weakness to mystify the "power" and ostensible "wisdom" of man in bringing about his own salvation. God's way of saving the world was not to be by military might and earthly power. In fact, God's way of gaining his rule over rebellious man and of breaking the power of Satan and his kingdom of darkness, was to be through suffering love and human weakness of his Child, Jesus. The Light of the World, Jesus, would come into this dark world, and submit to his Father's will for the cross. And so, through his agonizing suffering and death, his becoming the Sacrifice in our place, we would win the victory that would free us from sin, death and the eternity-sentence of hell. When the Son of Man was dying for us, and had become our sin curse, the earth was covered with an eerie, also ungodly darkness "that could be felt" (Luke 23:44). (See *DBI*, cited above, pages 192f, for "darkness" as a biblical symbol for hell).

Notice that our text describes the Messiah king to be born as the triumphant warrior king. This victory over sin and death as a result of breaking Satan's power-hold was gained through his substitutionary death for us. It was by the shedding of his blood, and not the blood of us who were his enemies, that he gained the victory and won over our hearts. So the burning of the war garments become a reference to his garments stained with his blood shed for us. Jesus' victory was won through his triumphant resurrection from the dead, and he lives and reigns as our eternal King. In the eyes of the world, the kingdom of God may appear weak and insignificant, and his people, powerless. But as our text says, that's how Gideon and his radically reduced force of 300 men seemed to Midian. When God gave this small army victory over Midian, then he received the glory (Verse 4, Judges 6-7).

Our text describes him as the ideal governing King, who carries the weight of the government upon his shoulders, unlike the wicked Israelite and Judean

kings who placed heavy burdens on the backs of the people. Jesus has broken the yokes of oppression and given us his yoke, that of a delightful personal love relationship with him (Verse 4 and Matthew 11:29-30). Jesus breaks the bonds of guilt, the power of sin, and also of fear and all negative emotions. We are then free to love and be loved and to live in the freedom of surrender to his perfect, loving will. This release from bondage also tells us a lot about the social implications of the Gospel. When Jesus sets us free, we become his proponents and advocates for freedom and justice for others (See Oswalt, above reference, Pages 243-244).

The Light of the World is also our Wonderful Counselor (verse 6). In him we find all the riches of the wisdom of God, which is so different from the wisdom of people apart from God, this fallen world's "wisdom." This spiritual wisdom from God is the way of the weak power of the Cross, which is God's strange strategy for overcoming the world (as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16). The word "Counselor" is better understood as Enabler, as we see the Holy Spirit described in John 14-16. God is not our therapist, but is rather the one who guides and empowers us for life and godliness. He is, as our text adds, our Mighty God. There is nothing he cannot do and therefore there is nothing that we cannot do in him, with him, and for him.

And he is our Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (verse 6). What a great combination of attributes for our Savior, King and God! He is almighty but also, as our heavenly Father, he is loving and caring. He is everlasting, and he wants us to spend eternity with him in heaven, as Jesus prayed to the Father (John 17:24). As a loving Father, he takes full responsibility for us. Notice also, that Messiah is referred to as our Father. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three yet one. To know and love Jesus is to know and love God the Father and also to be loved by the Father. As the Prince of Peace, Jesus is the reconciler between us and the Father and between us and one another. This is the "peace on earth" announced by the heavenly host proclaiming the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:14). It is "shalom," a sense of wholeness that God gives to those who are reconciled to him and to others (Romans 5:1). With Jesus' first coming there was introduced a sword of division and even opposition between those who follow Jesus and those who reject him (Matthew 10:34). The fullness of peace that comes with Jesus' reign will take place at his second coming, when literally all war garments will be obliterated (Verses 5 & 7 of our text).

- *Those who have seen the Light*

The great light has shined upon those living in darkness. And the people in the first century who saw and believed in the Messiah were those living in a dark and gloomy land, a land that had seen many wars and was declining in population, just like the Galilee of Isaiah's time. When I read this description of Galilee of the Gentiles, which was an historic and repeated battleground for warring nations to the north and to the south, I thought of Belgium. We are in a spiritual dark land, and one that has seen oppression and whose soil has been soaked in the blood of nations at war, from the north, south, east and west. I thought also of a nation that is losing its Belgian population which is

being replaced by immigrants, just as happened to Galilee with the Assyrian invasion. And just as the situation in Galilee looked dismal in 740 BC and at the time of Messiah's birth, so also it appears to be here. But circumstances are right for God to act. Jesus came the first time into a land of darkness and gloom, and yet it was the right time for the light to shine. When it is darkest, the light is most needed and best seen.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, also living in a spiritually dark world of pagan superstition and human pride in wisdom, where "the god of this age" had blinded the minds of unbelievers. And he said, however, that even though Satan had blinded the people, God, who commanded the light at the Creation, made his light shine into blinded hearts. God's light shined into hearts "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6).

- *The difference the Light has made*

Because the Light shined into the darkness, there was no more gloom, but instead there was joy, the joy of harvest and the joy of victory over the enemy.

Some psychologists in the North America advise people to lower their expectations Christmas. This Season, constantly "hyped" by the media and rampant, non-stop commercialism, promises so much it cannot deliver. The impression the average person has is that the Christmas Season is non-stop merriment with loving family and friends, surrounded by the trappings of beautiful decorations, cozy conditions with the constant background of lovely Christmas bells and carols. If these conditions do not abound, and they are less likely this year with the economic crisis, then people are disappointed and can easily become depressed. Such Christmas "joy" is a far cry from the joy that our text says is the gift of The Light. This is a sense of his presence, closely akin to peace, which is a sense that all is well, and is a condition of robust spiritual health that is not threatened by one's circumstances.

The images from our text are of great celebrations, after an abundant harvest and victory in war (verse 3). I might add that one element that seems to be missing in Christian experience and church worship and fellowship is the note of joyous celebration. Even the way we observe the Lord's Supper might ought to, at least occasionally, be a festive experience of celebration and excited anticipation of our full and final victory when Jesus partakes with us of his marriage supper (Matthew 26:29; Revelation 19:7).

Are we aware of the radical difference Jesus has made in our lives? We are born again, out of death to eternal life. We are being made new creations in the likeness of Jesus. We are more than victors over sin, death and the downward pull of the old sinful nature. We are given abundant life, with meaning and purpose. In the place of isolation and loneliness we are given a relationship with God and with his people, one of forgiveness, love and total acceptance and genuine friendship. We need never fear death because our names are written in the Book of Life. We need no fear what man or tragedies can do to us, because God works everything together for our good

and his glory. We are promised that every need of our will be supplied, and are given the greatest gift of all—the Holy Spirit, who is our enabler, teacher and comforter. We need never be perplexed about the present or future, because the Holy Spirit is our source of wisdom in understanding, applying and obeying the perfect word of God, which is absolutely trustworthy and always relevant.

Through the converting, renewing, transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we are given Jesus, Emmanuel, the Light of the World! The Holy Spirit is the greatest gift because it is to receive Jesus himself (Luke 11:13). We receive a share in all that Jesus is and has, such as peace. He is the Prince of Peace (verse 6). Police in my home country are busiest on Christmas Eve than at any other time of the year. Part of the reason is alcohol abuse, with more drunk drivers on the road than at any other time of the year. Also, there is more domestic violence than at any other time. Jesus came to make an end to depression and warfare. He came to give life, full and abundant and running over!

No wonder Jesus enjoyed celebrating with his friends! He knew the extent of this abundant life he had come to give us, and rejoiced to share it with all who believe in him.

The Light brings personal transformation, but is also the hope for societal change. God's reign, even beginning now on this fallen planet, is that seeks justice and righteousness (verse 7), "*from that time on and forever.*" As evangelicals, we have often been remiss in applying the Gospel to our social situation, and to speak out in behalf of God's truth for morality, ethics, civil and religious liberty, and international reconciliation and peace. And many of you are in strategic places of opportunity to speak out in behalf of God's truth for justice and civic righteousness.

➤ **The Light continues to shine**

Jesus, the Light of the world, has come and he continues to reign. The Light continues to shine. I enjoy the Christmas lights that seem to counter these dark winter afternoons in Belgium. This past week, as I arrived at the house late in the afternoon, trudging up the hill on my bicycle, headlight and taillight aglow, I was warmed and heartened by what I saw. Nancy had decorated our little tree and placed it in front of the window, along with some lighted candles in the windows.

We have received the Light and...

- *The Light shines today*

Since the first appearing of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago, the Light has been shining. The Light is just as powerful and bright as when Jesus came to the earth. And since the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the Light has been shining into hearts that receive Jesus...

✓ Through the Word

The way God's light gains an entrance is "through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). The word is the sword of the Spirit that penetrates our hearts, the seed that germinates in our hearts (Ephesians 6:17; Mark 4:1-12 and parallels). No matter how dark, unbelieving and sinful a heart has been, the word can gain entrance, stir faith, and bear the fruit of true repentance and rebirth.

One of the giants of the church was Saint Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. It was to profligate sinner Augustine, during his youth, that God spoke literally through a child's voice, and young Augustine took up the Bible and read and was born again. "I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence (from Romans 13:13-14), it was as if a *light* (italics mine) of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled" (Book VIII, section xii, paragraph 29, *Confessions*, Saint Augustine, Oxford).

That's the reason I bother to learn the local language of our Flemish region and village, the heart language of the people where God has placed us. I mentioned to you the neighbor next door who recently died. We visited him in the hospital and in their home. I would always try to converse with him in Dutch, which he seemed to enjoy and appreciate. I talked with him about Jesus, his death for him and his resurrection and spoke about his need to believe in Jesus. As I assured him we were praying that we would be with him in heaven some day, I left with him a marked copy of a Dutch translation of the Gospel of John. I can only hope he read and believed. And if he did, he is in heaven today, which is our hope. The word is *that* powerful!

The Light shines through the Word and also...

✓ Through his witnesses

The government of our Savior, the Light, is increasing, as our text says it will do (verse 7). God is at work "populating heaven," in the words of Bill Hull (*The Disciple-Making Church*). And God works through his people, his witnesses, to increase his government.

One thing I do to develop my language learning is to watch Flemish or Dutch television news. A few years ago I watched an interview of the then Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, whose new book about his vision for "a united states of Europe" seemed to create quite a still in the corridors of the European Union. An official from another European country asked if such a dreamer could make a real difference in politics. The reply was, "It's the dreamers who are the politicians who make a difference." As God's people, we have been given his vision that the growth of his government and peace will have no end. And each one of us has a part in that growth, right here in Belgium.

I read a story from the life of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94), Scottish author and poet. "As a boy in (Edinburgh,) Scotland he would stand on the porch of his home and watch the old gas lamplighter move through his town lighting the gas lamps and leaving pools of light in his path. As the lamplighter approached his house, Stevenson said that he would run to his mother and shout, 'Mother, Mother, come and see a man who is punching holes in the darkness!'" (Page 94, in a book of sermons titled *How to Win Them*, from a sermon by Peter McLeod).

That's what we are called to do here in Belgium and wherever God sends us. There is plenty of darkness everywhere, so there will always be work to do, perhaps beginning with your own family. There is darkness in your workplace, your school, your community, and your network of social, business and everyday contacts. For us, the Christmas Season is a time for us to invite neighbors into the house for sharing food and friendship, or even for giving a small gift as an expression of love. Then God gives opportunity for words of witness, and our prayer is always that therefrom the word will go forth and the Light will shine into hearts made ready by the Spirit of God. Each person who comes to the Light will be another hole punched in the darkness.

"Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end," including right here in Belgium.

- *The Light shines through the zeal of the Lord Almighty*

And how grateful I am that the results of my witness are not dependent on what I can do! "The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this" (verse 7). You say that your unsaved spouse or neighbor, relative or friend is "mighty stubborn," or "mighty difficult" to talk with about spiritual matters. Our God is Almighty, and nothing is impossible for him.

The Hebrew translated "zealous" and "jealous" are closely related. They are close emotions. God so loves us he will not tolerate any rivals that would weaken our affection for and devotion to him. His zeal is for us to love him and to receive his love, and he is jealous over us and against whatever would damage or weaken that love. It's not our kind of petty, self-centered jealousy, but the zeal and jealousy of a God who wants is to delight in and enjoy him, even as he loves and delights in and enjoys us.

And we must realize that God is more zealous for the salvation of those around us that we are. He gave his only Son for them. Jesus came for them, suffered and died for them. And, every person we meet, even that seems to exude darkness, gloom, and an oppressively dark spirit, is one that has the potential of either an eternity in heaven or in hell. Everyone has the potential to become like Jesus or as hideous as Satan himself. And thus we must have the compassion and zeal of the Lord for their salvation.

Just Friday morning I read of Jesus' weeping over unrepentant Jerusalem and was made aware how far is my heart from being like that of Jesus, who wept over those headed for judgment (Luke 19:41). As John Stott has written so

forcefully, we evangelicals speak too glibly and thoughtlessly about hell. When we think of the possible destiny of many, perhaps most of those we meet almost daily, our hearts should break. Hell is a place of absolute darkness, of desperate, unrequited hopelessness. To be the light of the world as we are called to be, we need more of the compassion of Jesus and his zeal to see those in darkness come to his marvelous light (Matthew 5:14, 1 Peter 2:9, and See John Stott, pages 312f, *Evangelical Essentials*, by David Edwards and John RW Stott).

Conclusion:

Dare you look into your heart and see if there is darkness or light? No amount of artificial lights strung inside or outside your heart can dispel the darkness that lingers there. Only Jesus, the Light of the World, can shine and illumine and then “punch” that fatal hole in your spiritual darkness. I pray that even this morning you will open your heart to the Savior, the Light of the world. And then you will never have to be afraid of the darkness.

As we prepare to observe his Last Supper, we remember his sacrifice that enabled his victory for us and his light to shine within us to give eternal life. The Light of God came into the world and suffered and died for us. Yet he was raised again and he continues to invade the world with his light. And we share a calling to be his messengers and radiators of light. As Jesus said, we are also the light of the world, refractors of The Light (Matthew 5:14). I pray that our Supper of Remembrance will be a celebration of the presence of the Light of the world.

What an opportunity we have to share the Light at this Christmas Season! Let the Light of Christ shine into the darkness through your life and witness. I pray we will receive the Light and then share the Light in this place of darkness that yearns for the Light and suffers for want of the Light. Just as God not only intruded but invaded the darkness of this world, I pray that we will be used of God to invade the darkness around us as we “punch holes” in the darkness.

“The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What comes into your mind when you hear this Scripture passage speak of the “great light”?
2. What do you think is symbolized by the darkness Isaiah speaks about?

3. Do you sense spiritual and moral darkness around you? Where and in what ways?
4. How is conversion to Christ an experience of being transformed from darkness to light? What is symbolized by these terms?
5. Look at the names for the promised Messiah in verse 6. Write down on a separate line these four names: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Then, write a sentence beside each word what each title means to you. For example, beside Wonderful Counselor, write something like, "Jesus is the source of all true wisdom, and is my guide and comforter."
6. What would you say is God's strategy for (means of) distributing The Light into the world of darkness?
7. What role can you play in God's strategy for bringing light into the darkness?
8. In what ways do you think that the current economic crisis can awaken more people to their need for the true Light of the world and the real reason that we should celebrate Christmas?

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