

Light Has Dawned – A Sermon Preached by Reverend W. Dale Osborne

January 23, 2011, Binkley Baptist Church

Lectionary Texts: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; Matthew 4:12-23

I have seen teenagers rise up before the dawn without any parental, academic or work related encouragement. Over the past 12 summers I have witnessed this pre sunrise miracle hundreds of times. How can this be you may ask? What crazy teaching is this that our minister brings us? Teenagers stopped rising before the dawn centuries ago. Only dairy farmers' and bakers' children rise up before the dawn these days and they have a job to do. Well, I see this sunrise miracle on a beautiful North Carolina mountain range where three counties come together during a wonderful weeklong experience called Baptist Youth Camp or BYC for short. Young people rise up before the sun and walk straight up at a forty five degree angle for hundreds of yards until they reach one of several lookout overlooks on the camp's property. They are drawn upward by many factors. A veteran of camp may invite a first timer to make the trek as a way of welcoming them to camp. A young couple beginning a path to romance may think the journey will stay etched in their minds forever. A senior may jog up the steep slope at sunrise because he has promised himself for 6 years that he will see the sunrise at least once before his years at BYC come to a close. Whatever their individual reasons for climbing the steep slope at roughly 6:00 am, I believe they all have a shared communal reason for making the journey. A reason that predates their very birth. They are drawn to God's light. They are drawn to the sunrise that has come up over the earth's horizon for millions of years. This light, this sunrise, it is one of the oldest parts of our universe's existence. The gargantuan bright star we call the sun was brought into existence by the beautifully creative nature of the infinite One we call God. People have been drawn to the light and have looked forward to the light for all of recorded history.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.” The prophet Isaiah offered these words of hope to a people who were steeped in a history of hard times. The Israelites had experienced exile, famine, oppression and severe captivity. To see a great light in the midst of such darkness must have been a welcome prophecy to them. The Israelites are not the only people who have looked forward to light at the end of an oppressively dark tunnel. Today in Tunisia the citizens are looking for a great light as their capital is filled with violent political upheaval. Thousands of those citizens of Tunis are praying for a great light to shine on them. Our brothers and sisters in Port au Prince and the surrounding regions of Haiti are still plagued by disease and destitution following the earthquake of January 2010. They too are praying and hoping and working for a great light to brighten up the darkness in their community. In nearby Johnston County North Carolina far too many high schoolers have died over the past year as a result of car accidents. Two high school seniors perished in the past week. Their families and schoolmates are devastated by these sudden deaths. Those parents and friends are seeking a great light in the midst of terrible darkness. They huddle together in homes and houses of worship seeking solace in God's heart. For all these souls in need of light we offer our prayers of connection and support.

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? One thing I asked of the Lord, that I will seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in God's temple.” The poet offered these beautiful thousands of years ago. He or she sets forth a simple acknowledgement of how life flows for the ancient poet. God is my light. God is my salvation, the sustainer of my life. In God I am secure. In God's presence and embrace I have no one to fear. These words are foreign and the concepts are inconceivable to much of our world today. It is hard for people to declare that they are fully and gracefully engulfed and sustained by the light of God. To the question “Whom shall I fear?”, they answer, everyone and everything! Yet, as children of the eternal God, we are promised a way to face fear and transcend its power over our lives. We are asked to accept God's unending light as our gateway to sustenance and life. The psalmist simply and solidly put these verses to parchment and gave God all the adoration and adherence he could muster. God is my salvation and my light, God is the source of my sustenance in the face of adversity. I shall seek the beauty of God in the church and I will turn my questions regarding fear and hardship over to God's presence in the temple. Poppycock and gobblydigook you say. You are filling us with pleasantries and no proof pastor. Give us something from today

that we can chew on and believe. Where is God's light in 2011? Who inquires in the temple today seeking God's light? I am so glad you asked.

This week brought many people into this house of God seeking light and love and sustenance in the face of fear. I will focus only on a couple who happened our way on Tuesday. A fairly disheveled couple made inquiry here on Tuesday morning and afternoon. They were travelling from Duluth, Ga. back to their home in rural Indiana. The husband had interviewed for a job in Duluth and was grateful that he had been offered a job that paid considerably more than his work in Indiana. Misfortune overtook them before leaving Duluth however as their van was broken into and most of their belongs were stolen. They made their way as far as North Carolina hoping to find help from a cousin in Johnston Co. They had no cell phones as that was part of the robbery but they did have two small children back in Indiana staying with the wife's sister. When the cousin was nowhere to be found in Johnston Co. they headed west on I-40 hoping to get back to Indiana and their children as soon as possible. A damaged fuel pump forced them to make their way off the highway near our church. They parked the now broken down van in a parking lot near the Siena Hotel. They survived a couple of searches of their van by law enforcement and eventually made contact with a mobile mechanic who was willing to help them repair their van at a reasonable price. The couple ended up at Binkley because someone at Caribou Coffee said they might find help at God's temple on the corner of Willow Drive and Fordham Blvd. They made inquiry of our volunteer in the office. They made inquiry with our Business Manager and Office Manager. They made inquiry with our minister Peter Carman who, by the way Peter, they said you had the spirit of God within you. Then they made inquiry with me and I was made privy to their long and sad story. Well, after over 18 years of listening to people who have great need in their lives, I must tell you I was a tiny bit skeptic of their story. I pray God will forgive me for my skepticism. Several phone calls to the mobile mechanic and to the police convinced me that this couple was very much who they said they were. They were really in great need and they had come to God's house seeking light and love and help. And did I mention the wife was several months pregnant. Based on my conversations with the mechanic and Advance Auto parts and after calculating the mileage from Chapel Hill to their home in Indiana was over 600 miles, I determined that this light seeking couple needed about \$260.00 to get home safely. \$100.00 would need to be in cash to pay the mechanic but the rest could be paid for with credit cards. Now I need to tell you that we do not keep cash here at the church. We also rarely help any person in need with such a large sum of Godly assistance. There are just too many people in need. Then some miraculous lightbearing things happened. Duane, our business manager called me into his office and showed me five \$20.00 bills that Joe Clontz had found in the children's offering box after the Sunday offering had already been counted. Thank you children of Binkley for placing such a large offering in the box. Then, I made calls to St. Thomas More and Hillsong Church to see if the light of God was clearly shining in their temples of worship. Well sure enough it was. Not only were they willing to offer financial support, but the angel at Hillsong was willing to drive over to Binkley to interview the couple. While all this was occurring, I could not help but notice how hungry the couple looked. I had given them some peanut butter crackers but that did not really do the trick. While driving to the auto parts store to pick up the new fuel pump and a few other parts, I spotted the last of four K&W coupon cards that a charter member of our church gave me right before Christmas. He asked me to pass them on to families in need of a good dinner. That \$25.00 gift card became another source of God's light for this couple. At approximately 3:00 pm I made my last call to the mechanic informing him that the couple had everything they needed to get the repair done. He agreed to meet them right away and the angel from Hillsong church drove the couple back to their van. Before they all took off however, we say down in my office, grasped hands firmly and thanked God for the light that had come our way that day. All of us had been bathed in light as we worked together to respond to the inquiries brought forward by a desperate couple who, like the psalmist, held true to these words "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? One thing I asked of the Lord, that I will seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in God's temple." May the light of God in Christ always shine upon you, within you and through you. Thanks be to God.