

An Order of Worship for the Home

January 3, 2020
Guest Preacher
Rev. Aaron Putnam
City Director, LINC Bay Area



This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Invocation

Reader 1: Merry Christmas! Our God is with us.

Reader 2: Our God is Immanuel. Merry Christmas!

Reader 1: We invite our God to lead our worship.

Reader 2: The Father, who gave his only begotten Son;

Reader 1: The Son, born as a human baby on Christmas;

Reader 2: The Spirit, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Together: Amen. Merry Christmas!

Psalm 119:97-104

⁹⁷ Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.
¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
¹⁰² I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

Confession & Absolution

Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.

Christian Confessing: Jesus, you came as light into darkness. I have to admit there's a lot of darkness in me. I know your light drives out the darkness, but sometimes I hide the dark secrets because I'm embarrassed. Other times, I keep some corners of my life in the dark because I secretly want to go back to them. Forgive me. Shine your light in me and drive the darkness away.

Christian Responding: The darkness always gives way to the light. Jesus is the light of the world, and he shines his light in your life. He's heard your prayer, and he answers with a resounding, "Yes!" You have received the gift of Jesus this Christmas, and you are born new by the work of God. You are a forgiven child of the Light.

Together: Amen.

Luke 2:40-52

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made;

who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried.

And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.

And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Isaiah 60:1-6

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.

³ And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.

Message – Rev. Aaron Putnam, City Director of LINC Bay Area
Light in the Dark

I want to ask you a question. How many of you have been spelunking before? If you're familiar, spelunking is exploring caves. How many of you have ever had the opportunity to go deep into a large cave where there are stalactites and stalagmites, and really be able to experience what that is like inside of a cave? Exploring caves is really interesting. It's really fun, but it can be scary, especially if your light goes out. If you have a flashlight or some kind of lantern and that goes out, in a cave you can experience total darkness. It's an absence of light which can be not only scary, but it can start to do strange things to your mind as well.

It's been documented by studies that within a few hours of total darkness you can find yourself experiencing auditory and visual hallucinations as your mind attempts to fill in the gaps. You lack sensory input, and your mind starts to hallucinate and come up with these ideas of things that you're hearing or you're seeing. It can be really scary in the darkness of a cave.

The year 2020 just came to a close and what a year it was! We know how crazy it was; a year full of tension, a year full of stress. We've had 10 months of Covid reality that's still going on, but also 10 months of Covid around the world. We've had charged emotions over the presidential election in our country. We've had big crazy wildfires this summer in our state. We've had protests against racial injustice in many of our communities. It has been this year of tension and stress, and for many it's been a year full of darkness.

Now we're here in 2021, just a few days in, and for some of us things don't seem so different. We're still stuck in our homes, feeling like we're stuck in a cave and trapped in darkness. As bad as the darkness of the world around us feels, we know that the darkness of our lives inside of us can be even worse.

How ironic that this morning we are observing the Day of Epiphany, the Feast of Epiphany, the Feast of Festival lights, The Day of Light. It's a day that begins the Season of Epiphany. In the church year, the Season of Epiphany is all about the manifestation – the revealing – of Jesus as the Savior of the world. God himself came into this reality not only for the people of Israel, but for all people. He is revealed as Savior and as King.

We know that Epiphany is all about light shining into darkness. This is the theme of Epiphany. It's manifesting and revealing the grace of Jesus and the hope of Jesus. Yet, we struggle to live out this reality in our own lives. We grope around blindly in the darkness of our lives.

What darkness is causing you to feel hopeless today? How are you feeling helpless this morning? What darkness is leaving you down today? In what ways are you struggling with depression right now?

The darkness that we experience can be scary, and it can do strange things to us. In the midst of our darkness we can start to hallucinate. We can start to fill in the gaps of things that we don't see or understand. We can start to doubt.

Does God really love me? Is he really here? Is he really around? God, where can I even see a glimmer of light in my life? I'm dying here in the darkness. I need some light. I need some hope. I need some joy in my life.

This is something that many of us are experiencing or have experienced. We're not alone in this. Isaiah describes a similar scene of darkness affecting the people of Israel, God's chosen people. Listen to these verses, which come just prior to this morning's reading. This is the people of Israel speaking:

*⁹ Therefore justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not overtake us;
we hope for light, and behold, darkness,
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.
¹⁰ We grope for the wall like the blind;
we grope like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among those in full vigor we are like dead men.
(Isaiah 59:9-10)*

The Israelites depressingly describe this darkness that is upon them, that they are living in, that they are feeling, and the situation not only within them but around them.

Centuries earlier, the Lord had chosen Israel to be His people, to be His prized possession. He had chosen them to be a light, to reveal His glory among all the

other nations with whom the Israelites lived and walked. They were chosen to manifest – to reveal – the glory of the Lord upon the earth.

Here is the problem: The Israelites often times were more worried about themselves than they were about reflecting the light and the glory of the Lord to those around them. They walked among the other nations, but they didn't reflect the light of the Lord among those nations. The result was that the glory of the Lord would literally leave their presence when they went into exile. It was nowhere to be found among them, and the Israelites were trapped in darkness like they were stuck in a cave. They knew the darkness of sin and death.

There was no lack of darkness in Israel, and there's no lack of darkness in our day. The words of Isaiah 59 resonate with all of us.

*...we hope for light, and behold, darkness,
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. (Isaiah 59:9b)*

The real truth in all of this is that at one time or another we have all felt this. We've all experienced this reality of living in darkness. Everyone has felt the weight of sin, either their own or sin that has come upon them from outside. They've experienced the weight of death upon them. All of us have... even Jesus... especially Jesus.

Do you remember? Listen again:

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)

In his love for you and me, the Father allowed the Light of the world, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to enter into the darkness of your sin and my sin and the world's sin. On the cross the light of Christ was eclipsed. It was extinguished. He was crucified, dead, and buried. He was buried in a tomb. Jesus was literally trapped in darkness and stuck in a cave. He experienced the reality of the darkness of death, the helplessness, and the hopelessness, and the loneliness.

He knows your struggles, He knows your pains. He's experienced those in the fullest and the deepest way, even beyond that we can imagine. He has experienced the darkness you are dealing with right now. He knows you. He understands you. He's experienced that. Yet, that's not all he has experienced.

Remember! Early in the morning on the third day the Light of the world, Jesus, came out to shine again, to shine on you and me. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! He shines like the morning star. On Easter morning Jesus is revealed – he's manifested – as the resurrected King and Lord of the universe. Jesus, the Light, shone into the darkness of death, and darkness did not overcome him.

Isaiah calls out to Israel. Isaiah calls out to you and to me and says,

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. (Isaiah 60:1)*

Today is the day of the Lord's Epiphany, the day of his revealing. Today is the day the Lord reveals himself to you. Today is the day the Lord shines His light into your life. Today, the Lord frees you from the darkness of death.

Today the Lord calls you to come to the light and live. Today the Lord's glory rises upon you. Praise God! Praise God! As Psalm 27 reminds us,

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear? (Psalm 27:1a)*

Whom shall I fear? As the Lord shines upon me He is my light. This is Good News! We can rest in this Good News. This is Good News we can rejoice in, but this is also Good News that we can respond to.

There are people in our neighborhoods, and our workplaces, and our families, and our schools who feel trapped in darkness; who feel like they are stuck in a cave; who still live hopelessly and helplessly without the light of Christ.

Who is that person in your life who you know is feeling stuck in darkness right now? How will that person see the light of Christ? How will that person experience hope for today and tomorrow?

In the country of Norway there's a town called Rooker, and the town is getting smaller every year. The reason it's getting smaller every year is darkness. This town is situated in this narrow valley between two big, high mountain ranges. From September to March every year the town is in perpetual shadow, it's in darkness. The sun is behind the mountain. It only reflects, and they can see part of its reflection and glow on another mountainside. The people are in shadow for six months and they struggle with that. Many people are moving away because of that.

We think our winter can be dark. Imagine that! In order to improve the situation a bit some people in the town have this idea. They contracted a company to build three giant mirrors high up on the mountain face, so in the winter time the sunlight could reflect off of these mirrors. These three mirrors reflect the light right back down into the town square of this small town. For six months in perpetual shadow these mirrors are reflecting the light of the sun in the town square where people can come. They can gather together and can warm themselves in the light. They can enjoy each other and gain a sense of pulling themselves out of the darkness that they're living in.

Reflecting the light: that's what the Lord calls us to today. Christ calls you and me to be like those giant mirrors. We not only receive His light, His grace, and His truth, but then we reflect back His warmth and His forgiveness into the lives of those around us. In our baptism we received Jesus' Holy Spirit. It's the same Spirit that anointed Jesus as the Light of the world at His baptism. It's the same Spirit that penetrated the darkness of our hearts. The same Spirit has anointed you and me to reflect the light of the gospel in our various callings as parent, as child, as employer, as employee, as student, as teacher, as friend, as neighbor. In these spheres of influence, these different callings that we have, Christ calls us to reveal – to manifest – His grace and His truth in the lives of those around us.

Jesus empowers us by His Spirit, to reflect His light and His life until He comes again. At that final day we will see the light of our Savior, face to face. On that glorious last day, you will no longer be trapped in the darkness of your death. You'll no longer be stuck in the cave of a coffin. On the day of the resurrection of all flesh, that last day, the words of Isaiah 60 will not be just a hallucination, but they will be fully realized for you and for all creation as well.

*¹⁹ The sun shall be no more
your light by day,*

*nor for brightness shall the moon
give you light;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.
20 Your sun shall no more go down,
nor your moon withdraw itself;
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended. (Isaiah 60:19-20)*

With that Good News...

*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of
the Lord has risen upon you. (Isaiah 60:1)*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.

Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.

Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.

Reader 2: Receive our offerings.

Together: Receive us as your own.

Blessing (Isaiah 9:2)

Reader 1: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Reader 2: Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has shone.

Reader 1: Jesus is the Light of the world!

Reader 2: The Light has come into our world.

Reader 1: Now, Jesus goes with us into this world.

Reader 2: Walk in his presence. Walk in the Light.

Together: Merry Christmas and amen!

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

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