

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Prayer for illumination God of epiphanies, you reveal yourself to us in diverse and numerous ways. Free us the distractions that turn our focus away from you and your Word. Open us to the truth you reveal to us today. Amen.

Introduction: The Season of Epiphany characteristically focuses on light. One of its flagship texts comes from Isaiah 9, with its verse made famous by Handel's *Messiah*: "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" (verse 2). But what is this darkness? What, or who, is the light that has shined? And how might we lean into this passage and apply it to the current times?

(Rev Collin Cornell, WorkingPreacher.org)

FIRST READING

(NRSV)

Isaiah 9:1-4

New Revised Standard Version

9 [a]But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

**2 [b]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.**

**3 You have multiplied exultation; [c]
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.**

**4 For the yoke of their burden
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.**

SECOND READING

Psalm 27

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold^[a] of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

Continuing, 27:4-9

⁴ One thing I asked of the Lord;
this I seek:

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 his temple.

⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

⁶ Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷ Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸ “Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

⁹ Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off; do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!

Sermon

The Lord is my Light and My Salvation

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza

Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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I love to lean into the Book of Isaiah because I feel like it brings me closer to Jesus because Jesus quotes and speaks to the beautiful words of this profound book frequently. We are in the season of Epiphany in our church year – the season of light! A time when we focus on just what it means to be a people who live in the light – live into hope. And the Psalm I selected today speaks directly to that belief – “The Lord is my Light and My Salvation” – what powerful words.

I spent some time in Florida recently and if you are seeking light – Florida is the place for you! Sunshine is generally the order of the day. The first morning I was there, I exited from my bedroom and felt the rush of light that filled every crevice of the space I was standing in – so pure, so beautiful. We know our January's tend to be quite stingy with sunny days but we too, when the sun appears as it did yesterday before today's storm, it reflects on the snow and the brightness can be overwhelming.

While I was in Florida, I took time to visit Nasa at Cape Canaveral. What a fascinating place that is. To be amongst the great explorers of deep space – seeing all they have accomplished and where they hope to go next. Space has always fascinated me by its beautiful mysterious grandeur. The spinning planets, meteors, stars, and oh so much we have yet to understand. As of late 2025, one of the most significant recent discoveries is an ultramassive black

hole in the "[Cosmic Horseshoe](#)" galaxy, located 5 billion light-years away. It is estimated to be approximately **36.3 billion times the mass of the Sun**.

I am not an astrophysicist so I can't explain what the significance is of this discovery but I do know that even they do not know exactly what happens inside of a black hole.

Now I'd like to start by saying our scripture – our message today – is not "rocket science" but maybe it is. This is where the light of our scriptures meets the shadows of our world.

Isaiah speaks of "a people who walked in darkness" seeing "a great light." Psalm 27 begins with that bold declaration, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?" These are not poetic niceties. These are words spoken into real fear, real violence, real uncertainty. They were written for moments exactly like this one.

Because yesterday, on the streets of Minneapolis, we witnessed something that should trouble every person who claims to walk in the light. A man—Alex Petti—an ICU nurse, a caregiver, someone whose daily work was literally preserving life, was killed in a moment of chaos and force. And almost before his family could even begin to grieve, the labels began. The justifications. The distancing. The quick move to explain away a human life.

And this is where the people of God cannot simply shrug and move on.

Not because we are partisan. Not because we seek to inflame. But because we are people of the light. And light, by its very nature, reveals what is hidden. Light refuses to let violence be swept into the shadows. Light insists

on truth. Light insists on dignity. Light insists that every human being—every single one—is made in the image of God.

Isaiah tells us that God shatters “the yoke of their burden” and breaks “the rod of the oppressor.” That is not passive language. That is God taking the side of those crushed, overlooked, mislabeled, or dismissed. And if we are followers of that God—if we dare to call ourselves disciples of Jesus, the Light of the World—then we cannot stand silently by when darkness tries to have the last word.

But here is the good news: stepping into the light does not mean we must become experts in policy or protest. It means we choose courage over comfort. It means we refuse to let fear dictate our compassion. It means we speak truth with humility and act with love that is not afraid to be seen.

It means we let the light of Christ guide our steps—into conversations that matter, into advocacy that protects the vulnerable, into solidarity that honors the image of God in every neighbor.

Because the world does not need more people who throw up their hands and say, “What can I do?” The world needs people who say, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.” The world needs people who believe that even the smallest act of courage can pierce the deepest night.

And that is who we are called to be.

I do not want to live in the “black hole” of our world. A place where we get incinerated and our ideals are ignored – those that we have been living into through the teachings of Christ that have guided are very existence. When you

gaze up at an evening sky – do you see darkness or do you see the sparkling stars and planets? Do we study darkness or do we study what is illuminated?

Astrophysicists study the light objects but they acknowledge the power of the darkness. Focusing on what gives life and helping us avoid that which extinguishes life.

Darkness cannot be where we live – we are invited by God, by our Lord Jesus, to live in the tent of life and to bring forth love in every situation – to stand with the oppressed, to fight for freedom and unification. To love that which makes us unique and to celebrate all the precious, incredible elements that make up each and every human.

What are the odds that *you*, specifically, would be born at all?"

Then the answer becomes almost unimaginably small—because it depends on countless biological, historical, and relational factors aligning perfectly. Statisticians sometimes describe the probability of any specific person being born as so small it's effectively zero, yet here you are. Do you think that was unintentional by God? That God put you, me – US, here on this particular planet of life at this particular time and has given us an enlightened view of the world – one that constitutes love at the center of all things? Aren't you the divine in the world that is referenced in our scripture? God only chose to come to Earth in the flesh one time – BECAUSE God has given each of us the divine to change the world – with the power of our ability to see and choose love.

Military personnel do what they are ordered to do. We do what we are created to do. AMEN!!!!

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold^[a] of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

A Brief Message for Children

Sometimes things happen in the world that feel scary, even to grown-ups. And when kids hear adults talking or see something on the news, they might start to worry. If you've been feeling that way, I want you to know something very important:

You are not alone. You are loved. And you are safe here.

The Bible tells us, “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” That means God is like a bright light that stays with us, even when the world feels a little dark. God doesn’t want us to be afraid. God wants us to know that we are held, protected, and surrounded by love.

And you know what else? You have grown-ups—your family, your church, your teachers—who work very hard to keep you safe. When something sad or confusing happens, it’s okay to talk about it. It’s okay to ask questions. It’s okay to say, “I feel scared.” God listens. And we listen too.

Even when the world feels a little shaky, God’s love is steady. God’s light never goes out.

A Short Prayer for Children

God of Light, thank you for being with us when we feel happy and when we feel scared. Help us remember that your love is stronger than anything that frightens us. Keep us safe, keep our families safe, and help us share your light with others. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Holy God, Light of the world, we come before you carrying the heaviness of these days—the grief of a life lost, the fear that shadows our streets, the ache of injustice that feels too familiar.

And yet, you are our light and our salvation. You are the One who steps into the darkest places and refuses to let the darkness win.

Shine your light upon the family and loved ones of Alex Petti. Surround them with comfort that does not fade and with a peace that holds them gently.

Shine your light upon our city, upon all who are afraid, all who are angry, all who are searching for a way forward.

And shine your light upon us, O God. Give us courage to speak when silence harms, wisdom to act with compassion, and strength to stand with those who are vulnerable. Make us bearers of your light—not in grand gestures alone, but in the daily choices that honor your image in every neighbor.

Let your light guide our feet, steady our hearts, and kindle in us a hope that does not retreat. For you are with us, and your light is never overcome.

Amen.

Blessing

Beloved of God, go into this world as children of the Light. Let the courage of Christ rise in you. Let the compassion of Christ flow through you. Let the justice of Christ guide your steps.

May the light that shines in the darkness shine through your words, your actions, your presence. May it comfort the grieving, challenge the powerful, and heal the broken places of our world.

And may the blessing of God—Creator, Christ, and Spirit—go with you, before you, and within you, as you walk the path of peace and courage.

Go in light. Go in hope. Go in love.

Amen.