

Dear friends in our Savior,

Tomorrow is a new day. Have you ever had those days where this is your only solace? Nothing seemed to go right for you. Everything that you touched—at no fault of your own—seemed to break or stop working. There just seemed to be this darkness covering you. What you looked forward to was a different day tomorrow. You hoped that a night of rest and sleep would separate you from the rough day you had. At the setting sun of yesterday, you were beaten, battered and exhausted. But at the rising sun of today with sun's rays breaking forth into a new day, you were refreshed and recharged to go back out and start all over. This is the joy of a new day. Yesterday is history. It is gone forever. Today is new and fresh.

This is what Advent is all about. During this season of Advent, we are celebrating the dawn of a new day. This new day is what Zechariah sang about at the birth of his son, John the Baptist. He recognized that John's work was to prepare the way for the Messiah to come into the world whose coming would mark the beginning of a new day for the people of God. As we gather today to contemplate and meditate on the work of our God and continue our preparations for his coming, we celebrate with Zechariah today that **"A New Day Has Dawned"**

Luke 1:76-79 *And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."*

In the famous Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel", we sing, "O come O Dayspring from on high." Have you ever wondered where that word, "Dayspring" came from? Each one of the verses in the hymn begins with a different name used for Jesus in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Some of you might remember that the King James Version translated the phrase "the rising sun" from our text as "the dayspring". As Zechariah sang a song of praise about the birth of his son, he recognized the important work this child was going to do: he would prepare the way for the Messiah. Along with that, he praised God that the Messiah coming into the world meant that a new day was dawning for the people of God. This is what the word, "dayspring," means: the morning light, the aurora, the rising of the sun. After the long darkness of the night, the rising of the sun brings hope. Those first few rays of light breaking through the darkness of the night bring joy. Zechariah found his joy in the anticipation that the dawning of new day meant that God was coming to deliver his people as he had long promised.

The metaphor of light and darkness has long been used to refer to the spiritual state of people. Darkness has long been used as a symbol of ignorance, sin, grief woe and damnation. It has been used to describe the wickedness and evil of people. Light has been used to symbolize truth, goodness, life, happiness and salvation. For a long time, God's people had sat in the darkness of their sin. After the many repeated warnings through the many prophets God had sent to his people which they had ignored, God sent them to destruction by means of the Babylonians. After a period of exile, he allowed a remnant of people to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple and city. But after awhile, these also turned away from the Lord. When they rejected the prophet Malachi, God stopped sending prophets to his people. For 400 years, they had heard nothing from God. They wandered about in the darkness of ignorance and their sin. In their lack of understanding, they sat in the gloom and despair that God had forgotten about them.

But with the forerunner in John the Baptist coming into the world, Zechariah was beginning to see the light of a new day. God had not left his people. He had not abandoned his promise. The Dayspring from on high was coming to enlighten his people and light up for them the path to peace. This light would bring hope to his people by enlightening them with the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of Jesus. The time of darkness and despair was over and a new day was dawning for the people of God. Salvation was coming in this new day, and with it forgiveness of sins and peace with God in heaven.

This new day dawned for us the moment God brought his peace into our hearts through his Word or the

Sacrament of baptism. This is why the celebration of Christmas is such a joy to us. We have seen the light of Christ to know that we once were lost in the darkness of our sin. We understand the hopelessness and despair of sin. We were there, wandering around lost in the darkness. Gloom and despair ruled in our hearts. We had the natural knowledge of God to know that there is a god and we have sinned against that god. But the darkness that overwhelmed us kept us from seeing the path to salvation and from knowing who that God is and what had done for us.

Then the Dayspring from on high came to us at our baptism and a new day dawned. His bright light helped us to know the salvation that he alone could bring. The tender mercy of our God refreshed us with the forgiveness of sins. The light of Jesus as the new day dawned brought us a new start to life and gave us hope and joy. The word “forgiveness” that Zechariah used is such an interesting word. It really helps us to understand the salvation and peace our Savior brings. It means “sending away”. In Jesus, we know that our sins have been sent away from God’s sight. How far away? He sent them as far as the east is from the west. He sent them into the very depths of the bottom of the sea. He has blotted them out and wiped them from the record and his memory forever. In the darkness, we could not have known this. For us the day has broken. The light of Jesus has shone forth as this new day began, and we sit here today knowing the peace that is ours through Jesus alone.

Yet, we wait for another new day to start—an eternal new day. We still live in a dark world. In our world today, men still sit in darkness. They reside under the influence of the devil and their sinful flesh. Sin is rampant. To many, God doesn’t exist. If he does exist, it is only as a helper to pick them up when times get really bad or a consultant to reference when they aren’t sure which way to go. But to many, he doesn’t exist as the authoritative creator to whom they are accountable. He doesn’t exist as the loving provider who gives all that he needs for physical and spiritual life. We see this darkness in our world every single day. We hear about the killings and murders, the thieves and cheats, the conmen and the schemers, the boasters and the braggards, those who care first and only for themselves and will trample you at a moment’s notice. Perhaps you too have dark corners of your life where you are sitting in the darkness of sin and confusion. Perhaps the shadow of death still casts its dark shadows over your days and gloom and despair reign. In our day, it could be the economic situation that you are in that overwhelms you with darkness as you struggle to get ahead but have a hard enough time staying even. In this world, darkness still seems to reign with despair and gloom as its companions.

That light of Christ, our Dayspring from on high, still shines into our lives every time we hear his word. There is forgiveness for that sin which you are hiding in the darkest regions of your heart and praying doesn’t come out to see the light of day. Find your peace in knowing the salvation that Jesus brings. His first coming guaranteed that sin is gone from God’s sight forever. Whatever darkness might be covering you—find your peace in the path of salvation and love of your God. He loves you so much that he was willing to come from on high to rescue you. He was willing to undertake a rescue operation that guaranteed his death. Yet he did it for you! And with that, he sent that sin away from God’s sight forever and made you part of his eternal kingdom. You are God’s child now. You hold citizenship in his kingdom now. See the light of your Savior. Let his light bring you hope and joy as you know the salvation of our God.

Here is our hope: we are waiting for a new day to dawn. This is what we are preparing for—the day when Jesus comes back to this world and our eternal day starts in the mansions of heaven. After the long darkness of this world, Jesus coming will bring a new start and a new day. The days of sin and sorrow will be gone forever. They will be yesterday’s news and will not find their way into tomorrow. With centuries of Christians, we raise our voices to sing, “O come O Dayspring from on high. And cheer us by your drawing nigh. Dispel gloomy clouds of night and death’s dark shadow put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.” In the contemplation of God’s love for you, find your peace and joy this season and always. In the dark days, open the pages of scripture to let Christ’s light dispel that darkness. When the shadows of death overwhelm your day, let the light of Christ chase those shadows away. A new day has dawned. Rejoice and find your peace in Christ your Savior. Amen.