

BIBLE MONTH WEEK 2. ISAIAH: LIGHT TO THE WORLD.

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Call to worship

As we worship in church buildings or on zoom or by YouTube: wherever we are-

We come praising Jesus, the Light of the world!

Shine in our hearts Lord Jesus!

We believe in the strength of God to illuminate dark places.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it.

Lord, in this hour of worship, kindle in us the light of your love.

Let your light shine through us, now and forever.

Hymn SthF 59 Lord the light of your love <https://youtu.be/AOCqAIA9m04>

<p>1 Lord, the light of your love is shining, in the midst of the darkness, shining : Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us ; set us free by the truth you now bring us — shine on me, shine on me.</p> <p><i>Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory ; blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire. Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy ; send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light !</i></p>	<p>2 Lord, I come to your awesome presence, from the shadows into your radiance ; by your blood I may enter your brightness : search me, try me, consume all my darkness — shine on me, shine on me.</p> <p>3 As we gaze on your kingly brightness so our faces display your likeness, ever changing from glory to glory : mirrored here, may our lives tell your story — shine on me, shine on me.</p> <p>Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)</p>
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Prayer

Lord God, the God of Abram, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob: Creator of all; Lord of all; our strength and our hope; We praise you for all the stories of old where the light of your love and your power lifted up your people from darkness to the dawn of new understanding.

Lord God, the God of Moses, Your saving Grace brought a people from dark captivity into a land of light and promise. We praise you that we too have stories of your enduring love, leading us from places of bondage into the freedom of living in your light.

Lord God, as we meet in your presence, we praise you for the light of Jesus, who took our human nature upon himself so that we might see the splendour of your radiant and unremitting love for us.

Lord God, we bring to you our thankful hearts, our open minds, our welcoming hands and ready feet so that we truly in our lives display your light, and be changed from glory to glory so that our lives here may mirror your story, filling our lives with the light of your holiness and righteousness.

May each one of us know that we are in the presence of the living God and be anointed afresh by your Holy Spirit. Amen

Young People's Video

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HwVF7C8qonNjP9toOHqhc3WNzjvIR1Y/view?usp=sharing>

Hymn StheF 155 Come Holy Ghost our hearts inspire <https://youtu.be/5fehCum04JQ>

<p>1 Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire, let us thine influence prove ; source of the old prophetic fire, fountain of life and love.</p> <p>2 Come, Holy Ghost (for moved by thee the prophets wrote and spoke), unlock the truth, thyself the key, unseal the sacred book.</p>	<p>3 Expand thy wings, celestial Dove, brood o'er our nature's night ; on our disordered spirits move, and let there now be light.</p> <p>4 God through himself we then shall know, if thou within us shine ; and sound, with all thy saints below, the depths of love divine.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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Sermon <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KdzcdQcdATNQUkTGs2fCic1Y2VoCof2l/view?usp=sharing>

WEEK 2. BIBLE MONTH

In 1966 I was on the 6pm Saturday evening BBC news! Not being interviewed or named but in a filming of people protesting outside the USA airbase in Ruislip, protesting against American involvement in the war in Vietnam. I was 18. Over 5 decades later, Nigel and I were visiting Ho Chi Minh city, known to my former 18-year-old self as Saigon. Our tour guide was a local man, a few years younger than myself. He had been a child during the war. Pressed by our tour party into speaking about that time, he told us many stories which involved his family. There were on the one hand stories of heartbreak, hunger, despair, deprivation and death. On the other hand, they were also stories of courage, caring, steadfastness, sharing and sacrifice. In the midst of the political darkness of that time, there was light.

This was also Isaiah's contention. That light was there, however politically dark it seemed.

It is easy to overlook that the book of Isaiah wasn't written in an ivory tower of life pootling along in an even manner but was punching through political conflicts – and those conflicts had their detrimental knock-on effects to the lives of ordinary people. Assyria was the current threat. An imperial nation: ruthless, conquering, controlling and a regime of terror for the people it sought to dominate.

So let's do a little bit of looking into that, the political backdrop to the Isaiah writings.

During much of its early history, Assyria was itself controlled by various powers that periodically invaded Mesopotamia, conquered Babylon, and extended their rule over the Assyrian inhabitants. During the years 1300 to 800 B.C., the Assyrian kings engaged in continual struggle to keep their boundaries intact, with the primary military objective of freeing Assyria from foreign domination. They expanded their territories and annexed newly-conquered areas to the Assyrian state. Succeeding kings improved upon this policy, increasing the army's power and reputation and building a vast empire that ruled many peoples with a harshness and terror previously unsurpassed in history. It was the rise of this Assyrian Empire that figures so heavily in the prophecies of Isaiah and the political policies of Israel's neighbours. As the Assyrians, under the new imperialist dynasty, began to take more vigorous military action against the tribes that resisted them, they were able to build up a ring of vassal countries surrounding the Assyrian homeland. The cruelty of their soldiers with rape, torture and indiscriminate murder was legendary.

So, what of Egypt, that country which had once enslaved the Chosen People of Yahweh, that country which was opposed to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses? Still opposed- oh yes, most certainly yes, but weaker in political and military terms.

So where is the light?

FIRSTLY,

Isaiah has an extraordinary vision:

- FIVE cities in Egypt giving allegiance to the Yahweh
- An altar to the Lord at the heart of Egypt
- A great highway between Egypt and Assyria WITH THE WORSHIP OF THE LORD IN BOTH NATIONS
- AND most amazing of all, the Lord will say Blessed be Egypt **my** people, Assyria **my** handiwork and Israel **my** inheritance.

Was this just 'ivory tower' thinking or had a Isaiah a sound foundation for that vision?

Yes, he had. He had that vision on sound foundation from two perspectives- and those two intertwine.

from theology. The God of Israel, was that God who in the theological treatise at the beginning of Genesis, was the one who separated light from the darkness. Darkness is there but so is the light. And what do we read in John's Gospel, written 700 years later but in the same theological theme: *the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.* Light does not cease when evil and wickedness roar around to pierce the lives of the innocent with struggle and disaster and bloodshed. There is always light. As our Vietnamese tour guide so eloquently told us- *There were on the one hand stories of heartbreak, hunger, despair, deprivation and death. On the other hand, they were also stories of courage, caring, steadfastness, sharing and sacrifice.*

from the experience of their history. Time and time again the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses had rescued and redeemed his people. Look at the book of Psalms: well as the songs of lament, hymns of praise to a creator God, Royal and Wisdom Psalms there are 15 Thanksgiving Psalms which tell the stories of a deliverer God.

As we read in chapter 60 verse 2 "See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples but the Lord rises upon you, and his glory appears over you."

The working out of who God is and what he does are intertwined in those two strands.

So the SECOND point about how we who are disciples of the Living God show forth that light?

In chapter 56, Isaiah has the amazing vision: that the light is for everyone, not just the Chosen. He focusses on the two types of people excluded from the temple: foreigners and eunuchs. Isaiah has the vision of all people, including those, being drawn into the embrace of God's family. This was to have been a shocking prophecy for the people hearing it and reading it. WHAT: we are going to have **those** people amongst us? I was privileged recently to be at Bradfield, Tutts Clump Vision Day as they seek a way forward for that congregation. A strong theme which emerged was that of *Hospitality*. The welcome that can be geared towards the needs of a community so that the Light of Christ can be clearly seen. Therein lays our discipleship and what our Mission Action Plans have been all about. As Jesus said "YOU are the light of the world. Let YOUR light shine so that your good deeds may be seen and glorify your Father in heaven."

I told this rather silly story earlier this year to the folks at Trinity Basingstoke. It goes like this:

A chiropodist was on one dark Winter's night just preparing to go home when he heard a knock on the door." Come in!" To his surprise a moth flew in and sat on the chair in front of him. The moth embarked on a sad and sorry tale of his life's problems: his difficult job and how he had been so miserable his wife could stand it no longer and had taken refuge at her sister's house. The chiropodist at last got a word in and said "Look, I work all day with foot problems- corns, verrucae, bunions: what you need is a therapist. What made you come in here?" The moth replied "I came in because I saw the light on."

It is the firm foundation of Isaiah that the light of God is always on. That the light of God can never be overcome by the darkness. That even in those unexpected places of foreign dominion there that light can and will be found.

Of course, it is his wondrous words that we hear every Christmas. Isaiah 9 verse 2

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

WE are those people who have seen a great light. The question is how are we going as individuals, as church communities to bring that light into the open where it can be seen by those walking in darkness, whatever that darkness may be?

Let not be a question for too long but spilling over into who we are and what we do in the light of our Mission Action Plans.

Let the last words be those of Isaiah who says in chapter 60

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
²See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
³Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising up.
⁴Lift 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 nursed at your side.
⁵Then you shall see and become radiant,
And your heart will throb and swell with joy;*

May the light of Christ be with all. Amen

Prayer

Dear God, we long to walk in your light. Forgive us anything that holds us back and keeps us in the shadows. As we bring before you those things which we have done and said and those things undone and unsaid which made for darkness, we thank you that you hold out to us your forgiveness. Help us to be lights in the world, to your glory. Amen

<p>1 The Spirit lives to set us free, walk, walk in the light ; he binds us all in unity, walk, walk in the light. <i>Walk in the light, walk in the light, walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.</i></p> <p>2 Jesus promised life to all, walk, walk in the light ; the dead were wakened by his call, walk, walk in the light.</p> <p>3 He died in pain on Calvary, walk, walk in the light ; to save the lost like you and me, walk, walk in the light.</p>	<p>4 We know his death was not the end, walk, walk in the light ; he gave his Spirit to be our friend, walk, walk in the light.</p> <p>5 By Jesus' love our wounds are healed, walk, walk in the light ; the Father's kindness is revealed, walk, walk in the light.</p> <p>6 The Spirit lives in you and me, walk, walk in the light ; his light will shine for all to see, walk, walk in the light.</p> <p>Damian Lundy (1944–1996)</p>
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Intercessions

Let us pray for the Church and for the world

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you promised through your Son Jesus Christ to hear us when we pray in faith.

Lord, we ask you to give strength to all your Church in the service of Christ, enabling us to live lives of holiness and righteousness; that we who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world. Bless the churches of our circuit with a fresh anointing of your Holy Spirit as we seek to bring our Mission Action Plans to life, revealing Jesus the Light of the World to all.

Lord, we ask you to give wisdom to all in authority; and direct this and every nation in the ways of justice and of peace; that we may honour each another, and seek the common good as we care for one another and for our planet. Bring the light of peace into places of conflict.

Lord, we ask you to comfort and strength all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, giving them courage and hope in their troubles; and bringing to them the light and joy of your gracious presence. Bless those who care for them with wisdom and with fortitude.

Lord, we ask you to comfort those who mourn. May they hold fast to the words of Jesus, that He has gone to prepare a place for us, so that where He is, we may be also. As we read in your Holy Word that in the heavenly Jerusalem there is no need for sun or moon for you are the Light, may we look to that day in glory when all darkness is past.

We gather all our prayers in the words that Jesus taught us: Our Father, who art in heaven...

<p>1 God, whose almighty word chaos and darkness heard, and took their flight, hear us, we humbly pray, and where the gospel day sheds not its glorious ray, let there be light !</p> <p>2 Christ, you have come to bring on your redeeming wing healing and sight, health to the sick in mind, sight to the inly blind, O to all humankind let there be light !</p>	<p>3 Spirit of truth and love, life-giving, holy Dove, speed forth your flight ; move on the waters' face, bearing the lamp of grace, and in earth's darkest place let there be light !</p> <p>4 Blessèd and holy Three, glorious Trinity, Wisdom, Love, Might, boundless as ocean's tide rolling in fullest pride, through the world far and wide let there be light !</p> <p>John Marriott (1780–1825)</p>
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Closing prayer adapted from an Iona prayer

May the blessing of light be on you - light without and light within.

May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire,
so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it.

And may light shine out of the two eyes of you,
like a candle set in the window of a house,
bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.

And the blessing of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon us and remain with us always. Amen