St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, November 29th, 2026
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Hope Dawns
First Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 9:1-2

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
Light has shone on those who lived in the land of deep darkness.

In Advent we wait, and we do not wait in vain.
Our hope is in the Lord, for He keeps His promises.

Christ is the Light of the World; the darkness has not overcome Him.
Come, let us worship the Lord, our light and our salvation.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Holy and gracious God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we gather this morning in the dark days of the year to worship You, the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift comes down. You said, "Let there be light," and there was light. You have shone in our hearts to give the knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. We adore You for Your holiness, Your faithfulness, and Your mercy that endures forever.

We bless You that You did not leave Your people in the darkness. You promised a great light, and in the fullness of time You sent Your Son, born of a virgin, to live, die, and rise again for sinners. As we begin Advent, teach us to wait for His return with confident hope, not wishful thinking.

Send Your Holy Spirit among us now. Open our eyes to behold Your Word, open our hearts to receive it, and open our lips to praise You. Be present with us as we worship, and lift our eyes from ourselves to Christ. We ask this in His name and for His glory.
Amen.

Advent Candle Lighting

First Sunday of Advent — The Candle of Hope

Reader 1: We begin Advent remembering that our hope rests on the promises of God. Sin has brought darkness into the world and into our hearts. We cannot rescue ourselves. But God, rich in mercy, promised a Savior.

Reader 2: Jesus Christ is that promised Savior. The eternal Son came among us to redeem his people. He lived in perfect obedience, died for our sins, and rose victorious over death. Our hope is not in our goodness, but in his finished work.

Reader 1: We light the candle of hope, remembering Christ's first coming and looking forward to his return. The One who kept his promise to come will keep his promise to come again.

Light the first candle.

Congregation: Our hope is in the Lord. We trust his promises and await our Savior.

Prayer: Faithful Father, thank you for sending your Son. By your Spirit, turn our hearts from false hopes and teach us to rest in Christ alone. Help us live faithfully as we await his glorious return. In Jesus' name, **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Hear the word of the Lord: "If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:6-7, 9).

Let us come into the light, and confess our sin to God, trusting in His mercy.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful Father, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have loved the darkness rather than the light. We have bent to the ways of the world for the sake of approval and comfort. We have neglected Your Word, trusted in ourselves, and failed to love You with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. We are sorry for our sins and we turn from them. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, have

mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us in Your way, to the glory of Your name. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news of the gospel: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). God has caused His light to shine in Jesus Christ, who bore our darkness on the cross.

Therefore, if you turn from your sin and trust in Christ, hear and believe: in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

Children's Hymn: "Once in a Royal David's City"

Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.

Christ came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
sheltered by a humble stable,
cradled in a cattle stall:
with the poor, oppressed and lowly,
lived on earth our Savior holy.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see Him, but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high;
there God's children gather round,
bright like stars, with glory crowned.

The Lord's Prayer

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,

Forever and ever, Amen.

Hymn #122: "Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel"

Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lowly exile here,
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:
Rejoice, rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee,
O Israel.

Oh come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and deaths's dark shadows put to flight. Refrain

Oh come, desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart, one mind.
bid envy, strife and discord cease
and be thyself our source of Peace. Refrain

Responsive Reading

Psalm 27:1-4

[1] 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?
[2] **When evildoers assail me**
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

[3] Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.
[4] **One thing have I asked of the Lord,**
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.

Anthem (Music Ministry): "He Shall Be Called"

Prayer for Illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

Isaiah 9:1-2

9 But there will be no gloom for her who was 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 has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

[2] The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

Sermon

Some of you can probably remember a winter storm so bad that the power went out for days. At first, it felt like an adventure. We lit candles, pulled out extra blankets, and played board games by flashlight. But by the second or third night, the darkness was no longer fun. The house grew cold, the evenings felt long, and every sound outside seemed a little louder. Then the lights finally flickered back on. Do you remember that moment? Nobody gave a speech. We just stood there in the glow and breathed a prayer of thanks. Light changes everything.

That movement from darkness into light helps us understand why we remember the coming of Christ. Many Christians call the weeks before Christmas Advent, from a word that means 'coming.' Scripture does not command us to keep a special season, but these weeks give us a good opportunity to remember what it was like for God's people to wait for His promise, and so this morning we begin in the dark. That may surprise some people. The world usually rushes straight to the tree, the tinsel, the carols, and the gifts. But before we sing 'Joy to the World,' we need to spend some time with a people who walked in darkness. Only then will we truly understand why the coming of Jesus is such good news.

And as we wait with them, we discover our theme for today: hope. But I want to be clear from the start about what kind of hope we mean. When most people say 'I hope,' they mean something closer to 'I wish.' They say things like I hope it doesn't storm this weekend. I hope my team wins. I hope the test results come back clear. That kind of hope is like crossed fingers. There is no guarantee behind it.

But the hope God gives His people is very different. In the Bible, hope is an absolute confidence that God will keep His promise. It is not wishful thinking. It is faith looking forward.

If hope rests on what God has promised, then we need to hear His Word precisely where the darkness seems deepest.

Today, we are looking at a promise God gave His people at one of the darkest moments in their history.

Isaiah 9:1-2

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> **2 The people who walked in darkness**
> **have seen a great light;**
> **those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,**
> **on them has light shone.**

To hear that promise clearly, we first need to understand the darkness into which God spoke. Isaiah wrote these words about seven hundred years before Jesus was born, at a real and frightening moment in history. Assyria was the superpower of the day, and its king, Tiglath-pileser III, was pushing west with a brutal army. Around 734 to 732 BC, he swept down into the northern part of Israel. Second Kings 15:29 tells us that he captured the region of Galilee and the land of Naphtali and carried the people away to Assyria. Assyrian records boast about the same campaign. Zebulun and Naphtali, the northern tribes around the Sea of Galilee, were the first to fall.

That is why Isaiah 9:1 mentions them by name. These were the people who watched their towns burned, their families split apart, and their land filled with foreign settlers. Isaiah calls the region 'Galilee of the nations.' It sat along the Via Maris, the Way of the Sea, a great trade road running between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Armies marched through it. Merchants traded through it. Foreign gods were carried along it.

That constant movement through the region affected more than its security. For a faithful Israelite, Galilee became a place where the lines between God's people and the pagan world had grown blurry. It was a borderland, a place where acceptance of ways that went against God's commands was accepted for the sake of approval and commerce, and it was the first place the darkness rolled in.

With that setting in mind, listen to how Isaiah describes their condition. He does not minimize the darkness. He says the people 'walked in darkness' and 'dwelt in a land of deep darkness.' Some translations render it 'the shadow of death.' The Hebrew word there, *tsalmaveth*, is the same one David uses in Psalm 23 when he speaks of 'the valley of the shadow of death.' It is the darkest darkness the Hebrew language could describe. And the verb 'walked' pictures people living in it day after day. This was not just a single bad evening or event. This was their way of life.

To feel the reality of that image, we need to remember what darkness meant in the ancient world. Today we flip a switch and the room is bright. In Isaiah's day, when the sun went down, the world went dark. A little clay oil lamp gave off about as much light as a candle. Night was a time of danger, when wild animals prowled and thieves came out of the shadows. So, when Isaiah uses darkness as a picture, his readers would have understood it differently. Darkness meant fear, confusion, and helplessness.

Yet even that picture of danger does not take us to the heart of their trouble. Isaiah is talking about more than personal safety, possessions, commerce and politics. In the verses just before our text,

> **Isaiah 8:19–22**
> **19 And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. 21 They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. 22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.**

The people had turned away from God's Word and were consulting mediums and spirits. They would look to the earth, Isaiah says, 'but behold, distress and darkness.' The deepest darkness was not Assyria. It was a people who had wandered from the living God and shaped their lives to fit the world around them.

The deepest darkness we can ever experience is separation from God and this passage hits very close to home. Friends, that darkness is still with us today. Sin, fear, uncertainty, and death are real. Some of you are walking into this Christmas season with an empty chair at the table. Some of you are carrying a diagnosis, a broken relationship, or a quiet anxiety you haven't told anyone about. And beneath all of those, Scripture tells us there is a much deeper darkness that exists in every human heart.

The bending to the ways of the world for the sake of approval and commerce. The selective reading and understanding of Scripture so you can live as we you want. The Bible calls it what it is sin. We are not simply people who need a little more light. Left to ourselves, we are people who love the darkness. As Jesus put it, 'the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light'.

That is why we must not hurry past the darkness on our way to Christmas. We cannot paint a smile over the pain or ignore our sin. We need God to do what we cannot do for ourselves. And here is the mercy of this passage: God does not leave His people in the darkness He has exposed. Into that very darkness, He speaks a promise of light.

Listen, to God's answer. 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.' Where does the light come from? Not from within the people. They did not reach down deep and find their inner strength. They did not organize a better army or come up with a smarter foreign policy. The light shines on them. It comes from outside them and from above them.

That is the very heartbeat of the Gospel. The answer to our darkness does not come from within us. God causes the light to shine. The same God who said on the first day of creation, 'Let there be light,' speaks again into the darkness of His people.

Paul makes exactly that connection in

> **2 Corinthians 4:6**
> **6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

Salvation is a new creation, and new creation is always God's work. He does it by His Holy Spirit, who takes the Word of God and opens blind eyes. As our Shorter Catechism puts it, the Spirit convinces us of our sin and misery, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renews our wills, so that we are persuaded and enabled to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel.

To picture just how that work of God’s grace works, I want you to think about a sunrise. Nobody in this room has ever made the sun come up. You can set your alarm, open the

curtains, and stand on the porch with your coffee, but you cannot cause the dawn. You can only receive it.

That is what God's grace is like. Hope begins with God's sovereign work, not with human improvement.

God does not simply make the first move and then wait for us to finish the job. We do not climb up to God by our good behavior. He comes down to us in His great mercy and does what we could never do for ourselves. If salvation depended on us finding the light switch, we would all be there fumbling in the dark.

So, why must God do what we cannot do for ourselves? Because our condition is more serious than we naturally admit. Paul says in

> **Ephesians 2:1-2**
> **2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—**

Not weak. Not a little lost. Dead.

And that changes the kind of help we need. A sick man may be helped by a little medicine, but a dead man needs to be raised. That is why the Gospel is not a self-help program with a religious flavor. It is a rescue. And the God who rescues does it, as Paul goes on to say, 'by grace' and 'not your own doing'. When we finally understand that, we stop trying to earn our way into the light and simply give thanks to God for it.

But this rescue raises another question: How can a holy God bring guilty sinners into His light?

Only through the cross. When Jesus hung there, darkness covered the land from the sixth hour to the ninth. The Light of the World went into the darkness that sinners deserve. He bore the wrath of God in our place, so that all who trust in Him are pardoned and accepted as righteous in God's sight, not for anything done in them or by them, but only for the righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone. The light we receive was purchased in the darkness He endured. And on the third day the Light rose from the grave, never to be put out again.

The cross and resurrection show us how God fulfils His promise.

Now let’s return to Isaiah's words and notice how confidently he speaks of that fulfilment, long before it comes. Isaiah says the people 'have seen' a great light. He uses

the past tense for something that had not yet happened. Hebrew scholars call this the prophetic perfect. When God makes a promise, it is so certain that the prophet can speak of it as already done. From God's point of view, the light had already dawned, even though seven centuries would pass before the people saw it with their own eyes.

That is what makes Biblical hope so steady. It does not rest on how things look in the world right now. It rests on what God has said. Isaiah's first readers were watching the Assyrians tear apart their homeland, and God was telling them, in effect, 'It is as good as done.'

God gives them not only certainty about the promise, but a glimpse of its greatness. Notice the size of the light. It is not a little light. It is a 'great light.' It is not a candle flickering in the window. It is the dawn breaking over the whole horizon. Isaiah's words get bigger as the chapter goes on. Joy will be multiplied. The yoke of the oppressor will be broken 'as on the day of Midian,' when God gave Gideon victory with three hundred men and some clay jars. The boots of the warriors will be burned. And then, at the very center, comes the promise of a child, which we will look at next Sunday.

The great light is not merely an idea. It is a Person, and Matthew shows us exactly who He is.

> **Matthew 4:12–17**
> **12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.**
> **13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:**
>
> **15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,**
> **the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—**
>
> **16 the people dwelling in darkness**
> **have seen a great light,**
> **and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,**
> **on them a light has dawned.”**
> **17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Matthew takes us from the promise to its fulfilment. Seven hundred years later, a young man grew up in a small town called Nazareth, right in the old territory of Zebulun. When He began His public ministry, Matthew tells us that He 'went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.' And then Matthew quotes our text: 'The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light.'

Do you see what God did? The very region that was first to be crushed by Assyria became the first to see the light of Christ. The place everyone looked down on became the place where Jesus preached, healed, and called His first disciples. In John 1:46, Nathanael asks, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' The answer of the Gospel is yes. The Light of the World came from the place of deepest shadow. God loves to bring His glory into places the world has written off.

And Jesus leaves us in no doubt about what this fulfilment means. He is the promised light. He said of Himself, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'. Notice the echo. Isaiah spoke of people who 'walked in darkness.' Jesus says those who follow Him 'will not walk in darkness.' He is the answer to Isaiah's longing.

Because that light has come in Jesus, we can look back with thanksgiving and forward with confidence. Think of how God's people waited for His first coming. In Isaiah's day, they waited because God had spoken. They trusted His promise for generation after generation. Old Simeon in the temple was still holding on to that promise when Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus in to be presented as was the law of Israel. Luke tells us he was 'waiting for the consolation of Israel'. Simeon waited because God had promised.

He waited to see the Saviour come. We wait to see that same Saviour return.

We are a waiting people. Jesus has come, and the light has dawned, but the darkness has not yet been fully driven away. We still bury loved ones. We still battle sin. We still watch the news and feel the weight of a broken world.

So, the church waits now for Christ's return with the same confidence that Isaiah's people had in God's promises. The God who kept His first promise to send His Son will keep His promise to send Him again. Revelation 22:5 says that in the new creation 'night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.'

Until that day, what does it mean to live by faith in the light we have already received? Picture a lighthouse on a rocky coast. On a stormy night, a ship's crew cannot see the shore. They cannot calm the waves or clear the fog. All they can do is watch for the light. When the beam sweeps across the water, they do not have to create it. They only have to trust it and steer toward it. That is what faith does. Faith does not make the light or earn it. It simply receives and rests on the light God has provided in Christ, and then follows where He leads.

That brings this promise out of the distant past and into our lives today. So let me ask you, gently: Where is your darkness this Advent? Maybe it is grief. Maybe it is fear about the future. Maybe it is a sin you keep hiding, or a heart that has grown cold toward God.

Whatever it is, hear this good news: you do not have to manufacture your own light. God has already caused it to shine in Jesus Christ. If you have never turned to Him, today is the day to turn from your sin, stop walking in the dark, and come to the Light. And if you belong to Him, lift up your head. Keep coming to the places where He has promised to meet you: His Word, His Table, and prayer. The night is far gone. The day is at hand.

And as we keep coming to Christ, His light shapes the way we live with others. Jesus, who said, 'I am the light of the world,' also told His followers, 'You are the light of the world'. Those who receive His light are sent to reflect it. This Advent, let the hope you have received shine into someone else's December darkness. God has sent His Light, the Light of the World, and He will bring His people into a day that never ends. Our hope is not wishful thinking. It rests on the promise of God, and He will keep His Word.

Let us pray,

Lord, late have we loved You, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have we loved You! You were within us, and we were outside, seeking You among the passing things of this world. You called, You cried aloud, and You broke through our deafness. You shone upon us and drove away our blindness.
Lord, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. Grant what You command, and command what You will. Let the light of Your Word, which we have heard this morning, not fade from our minds but take root in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives. As we wait for the coming of Your Son, keep us steadfast in hope, through Jesus Christ our Lord, the Light of the World. **Amen.**

Invitation to Offering

As an act of worship and gratitude to God, you are invited to place your offering in the offering box at the back of the church, as you leave today. We now offer our thanks to the Lord for His abundant grace and faithful provision through song and prayer.

Offering Prayer

(Congregant Prepared)

Offering Hymn #830: "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow"

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him, all creatures here below:

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Closing Hymn #110: "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"

Come, thou longexpected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver;
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever;
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, we thank You for the light of Your Word and for the hope we have in Jesus Christ. We confess that we are a waiting people; keep us steadfast until He comes again.

We pray for Your church throughout the world: strengthen the persecuted, embolden the faithful, and bring Your light to places of darkness. We pray for our nation and its leaders, that they may seek justice and peace. We pray for our community, for neighbors who do not know You, and for all who are lonely, grieving, or afraid this season. Comfort those with an empty chair at the table this Advent. Be near to the sick, the weary, and the anxious, and grant them Your peace.

Make us a people who reflect Your light, and let the hope we have received shine into someone else's December darkness. Hear our prayers for those on our hearts today, whom we name before You in silence.

Father, we thank You for the food and fellowship that follow this service. Bless the hands that prepared it, and bless this food to our bodies. May our time together be marked by

joy, kindness, and gratitude. We ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. **Amen.**

Benediction

Go in peace. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.” Go now in the light of Christ, and may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**