

DARKNESS & LIGHT

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:5

Lord may the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be acceptable in your sight.

Have you ever visited a cave? Many years ago on vacation, I visited Endless Caverns near New Market, Virginia. Unlike some caves, this one has colonies of brown bats living there. At one point in our tour, the guide shut off the lights so that we could get the experience of the deep darkness. This was scary for me because of the flying bats. But the experience is one I will always remember. For in that deep dark place below tons of earth and alive with bats, I suddenly remembered that the Lord was with me and would take care of me.

At times, our world today seems to be shrouded in darkness. The comfort found in John 1:5 can be our constant companion. It proclaims, “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*” As one biblical scholar stated: “The spiritual darkness can neither overpower the light nor understand the light and its ways.” And we read this in C.S. Lewis’ novel, *The Screwtape Letters*, for his fictional demon cannot understand that love is God’s genuine motive in his dealings with humanity and this love brings us abundant light.

I really like one variation on the translation of John 1:5, which states: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not *grasp* it.” The word translated *grasp* is from the Greek word *katalambano* (kat-al-am-ban'-o). It means not only to grasp in the sense of “understand” but also to “seize and overpower”.

The thought here is of the untouchability and indestructability of the light – it remains triumphant and beyond the reach of the darkness. No matter how much darkness may rage, it can never extinguish the divine Light, which shines on forever and that light can never be conquered. Christ was not grasped by the darkness of death. The Lord lives in the Light!

One of the many themes in the Gospel of John is the *tension between light and life as opposed to darkness*. One gospel story came to mind right away for me which illustrated darkness and its defeat by the light.

That narrative involved Jesus' walk on the water (John 6:16-21). I am sure you have probably heard this one quite a few times. The disciples are on a boat in the sea headed to Capernaum. It is dark and a storm comes up. The disciples become fearful. Jesus walks on the sea and states; *"It is I; do not be afraid."* In the safety of his presence and his love, they reach their destination.

This narrative is a mirror of Psalm 107:28-30 when God rescues distressed sailors – it proclaims: *"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven."*

In both the scripture narrative and the Psalm, amid the tension of darkness and light on the stormy water; and in the midst of many other reflections on this story, we can find that the light of the Lord overcomes dark chaos and dispels fear.

Jesus himself speaks of the tension of light and darkness in John 12:35-36 when he is explaining that he will not be physically present much longer in the world. He states, “*The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.*” Jesus is urging his listeners, *one last time*, to walk in the light – to be his disciples. In this appeal, these words are extremely important to Jesus’ audience for they are nearing the close of his public ministry. Now, he will preach only in private. As Jesus leaves the scene and the ministry of his signs ends, unfortunately some of his listeners are still stumbling in the darkness.

This tension of light and darkness is a part of our world. Some people still stumble in the darkness and some walk in the light. Yet, we are God’s people called to believe in the light, to embrace the light, and to mirror that light to the world. For each of us this is a personal quest and can involve many different and varied undertakings centered on our calling by the Lord. In order to continue our quest, we need to hope and live in the light of the Christ Child.

Just this week, I received a leaflet called “Advent Adventure: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love” from the Missionary Society of St. Columban. Even though this leaflet came after Christmas Day, it was a wonderful reminder that Advent involved strengthening our hope as we continue to come face to face with the tension of darkness and light.

This leaflet's author echoed what I hope we heard during our time of Advent with the Lord:

That in a world which often feels dark and uncertain, the light of Christ breaks through, promising a future of hope that is secure in him.

The peace Christ offers is deep and anchors us amid life's storms.

Encountering joy is more than a fleeting emotion – it is a response to God's goodness – even in difficulty.

Love is not just something we receive; it's something we're called to live out.

On Christmas Eve our Resurrection Community, with word and song, proclaimed the birth of Jesus – the true Light of the world! On Christmas Day we broke bread together, rejoicing in this Light!

Now - finally, coming full circle on this first Sunday after Christmas Day, we proclaim that the darkness cannot overcome the Light of the Christ Child. *Our hope is* in the Eternal Light which will always shine even during our struggles with darkness.

I pray that, as we move into 2026, each of us may proclaim our hope in the Lord as we cling to the light and shake off the darkness that attempts to enter our hurting world.

AMEN