We are on week two of our Advent Series entitled, “A Light Has Dawned.” Our primary text has been from Isaiah 9 which reads, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.”

Last week we spent some time acknowledging that the “darkness” spoken of in Isaiah 9 is real. It is a darkness that is both “out there” and “in here.” It is a darkness that we cannot free ourselves of on our own; and yet, left unchecked, it is a darkness that will destroy us. We also learned that the “Light” that is the hope of all mankind is a Light that comes from outside of our world; it is not a product of our efforts or our competencies or our own moral judgments. The Light who has come into our darkness is Jesus Christ; He is the fulfillment of the promises made by God through the prophet Isaiah.

This morning we will turn our attention to the nature of God’s LIGHT that has come into the world to save us from the darkness.

Our text will be Psalm 36:1-9. Please stand, and let’s read the Word of the Lord together.

My message this morning will fall under three subheadings: 1) the nature of Light; 2) the nature of darkness; 3) the intervention we all need.

I. The Nature of Light
First, let’s take a few minutes to consider the nature of light. Throughout the Bible, the Light of God is compared to the light we receive from the sun. In Psalm 97:11 the psalmist writes, “Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright heart.” Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of the darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Because we find this metaphor to be common throughout the scriptures, I think it’s appropriate to consider the nature of light as provided by the earth’s sun as a means of understanding the much deeper concept of God’s light as it enters into the darkness of our human condition.

Timothy Keller, in his book entitled, “Hidden Christmas,” breaks down the nature of God’s light into three categories: life, truth, and beauty. Let’s briefly look at each of these three qualities.

First, light brings life. It goes without saying that there would be no life on earth were it not for the power, warmth, and light of the sun. Every living thing depends on the sun for its existence in one way or another. The light provided by the sun not only enables life; it also enhances the
quality of our lives. Such is why the residents in Alaska have to battle severe cases of depression in the winter months when they only see the sun for a few hours. If you know people who have lived or still live in Alaska, you have likely heard of them tell how they invest a great deal of money and materials to manufacture light as a way of combating the effects of too much darkness.

When John writes about Jesus as the Light that came into the world, he writes in John 1: 3-4, “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” According to John 1, Light brings life; and life comes in the form of light.

When we look to our text in Psalm 36, the psalmist equates the Light of God with the steadfast love of God. He writes, “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings, they feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”

The imagery is extremely rich as the psalmist overlaps metaphors in an attempt to capture the life-giving and life-sustaining nature of God’s love, which is both “the fountain of life” and “the light by which light is seen.”

Jesus actually referred to himself as the Light that brings life. In John 8:12 he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Jesus also said in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the TRUTH, and the LIFE.”

That brings us to the next quality of light: Light reveals what is true. Have you ever gone on a long road trip that brought you to a new location in the middle of the night? If you’re anything like me, you probably went to bed thinking you knew where you were and generally what your surroundings looked like from the headlights of your car, but then you woke up in the morning and you discovered that everything was radically different from what you had concluded from your long drive in the dark. On my second trip to India, we arrived at our hotel late in the evening after 30 hours of straight travelling. My expectations were biased by my first trip to India, where our team stayed in a hotel right in the middle of a village bustling with people, commerce, and cows! Naturally, when my head hit the pillow that night, based on the drive and my former experience, I expected to awake to a similar environment. Imagine my surprise, then, when I was awoken by the sun only to discover that I had an ocean view from the window of my hotel room! I was pleasantly surprised by what was true, and what was true was revealed by the light of the sun.
The light of the sun allows us to see the truth of how things are, though that is not always a pleasant experience. Sometimes the truth that light reveals is not always easy to accept or embrace. I remember the first time the lady cutting my hair swung that mirror around and showed me the back of my head…not good. As far as I was concerned, and from what I could see in the mirror, I had a full head of hair! Most days I can still avoid looking at the beautiful bald spot on the back of my head, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t there! The Light doesn’t lie…and sometimes, the truth hurts.

In our text from Psalm 36, the psalmist says of God’s light: “In your light do we see light.” Think about that for a moment. I think the Psalmist is saying that it is only by the Light of God that we see any light at all. That’s actually a very profound concept that has been thought and written about for some 2000 years.

The argument here is that Jesus, the Son of God who came as Light into the world, is the singular means by which we can ultimately understand and make sense of the world. Now I know that is a controversial statement, and I hardly have time to unpack the argument, but let me refer to our friend and thoughtful intellectual, Professor C. S. Lewis, as he addressed this question in a paper given to The Oxford Socratic Club entitled, Is Theology Poetry? He was responding to the charge that Christians were wooed into believing a myth due to the lovely poetry of the Bible, as opposed to learning through observation and inference as trumpeted by modern science. Here’s a bit of what Lewis wrote:

I was taught at school, when I had done a sum, to “prove my answer”. The proof or verification of my Christian answer to the cosmic sum is this. When I accept Theology I may find difficulties, at this point or that, in harmonizing it with some particular truths which are imbedded in the mythical cosmology derived from science. But I can get in, or allow for, science as a whole. Granted that Reason is prior to matter and that the light of the primal Reason illuminates finite minds, I can understand how men should come by observation and inference, to know a lot about the universe they live in. If, on the other hand, I swallow the scientific cosmology as a whole, then not only can I not fit in Christianity, but I cannot even fit in science. If minds are wholly dependent on brains, and brains on bio-chemistry, and bio-chemistry (in the long run) on the meaningless flux of the atoms, I cannot understand how the thought of those minds should have any more significance than the sound of the wind in the trees. And this is to me the final test. This is how I distinguish dreaming and waking. When I am awake I can, in some degree, account for and study my dream. The dragon that pursued me last night can be fitted into my waking world. I know that there are such things as dreams: I know that I had eaten an indigestible dinner: I know that a man of my reading might be expected to dream of dragons. But while in the night mare I could not have fitted in my waking experience. The waking world is judged more real because it can thus contain the dreaming world: the dreaming world is judged less real because it cannot contain the waking one. For the same reason I am certain that in
passing from the scientific point of view to the theological, I have passed from dream to waking. Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.

To illustrate what Lewis is talking about, let us take the subject of human rights, and specifically the hot topic of the week, sexual misconduct. Like many of you, I was utterly shocked to learn this past Wednesday that Matt Lauer was fired by NBC following an accusation of sexual misconduct. Lauer was one of many powerful men who have recently been fired or censured for allegations of sexual misconduct…he was also one of my wife’s favorite TV personalities.

Now, at the risk of being misunderstood, let us consider what we can observe in nature when it comes to powerful males and weaker females. In nature, powerful, male mammals impose their will upon females on a regular basis. I’m a deer hunter, and I’ve actually observed this behavior from dominant, powerful bucks as they pursue and overtake young does. That’s “nature’s way.” In a purely scientific worldview of observation and inference, there is no real debate concerning the sexual ethic of deer, or lions, or zebras, or monkeys…they don’t have a sexual ethic. The strong males sexually dominate the weaker females. There are few if any species of animals that are monogamous, and in most cases, the powerful male is completely driven to sexually dominate as many females as he physically can.

However, as human beings go, we all KNOW that male domination of females is wrong. Every civilization with any written history knows such behavior is wrong…but how do we know that? Scientific observation of the natural world does not lead us to that conclusion. So how can we make sense of KNOWING something to be true that is precisely the opposite of what we can observe in nature?

This is always the problem with human rights issues, morality, and ethics. There are some kinds of behavior we all know are right and wrong, but we can’t make sense of why we know that based upon the scientific cosmology of random particles combined with time and chance.

It is only within a biblical worldview that we can understand why humans are different than animals: we were created in the image of God…we are personal, moral, and relational. Only through the revelation of God’s laws and God’s purposes for sexuality do we come to an understanding as to why we all know sexual domination of men over women is wrong. And only in Christ do we understand how we might find and extend forgiveness when human sexuality has been abused. I know that’s an uncomfortable illustration, but it’s relevant given the news we’ve been hearing all week long.
The final characteristic of Light that Keller writes about is this: Light is beautiful. For most of us who are blessed with the ability to see, the beauty of a sunrise over the ocean or a winter sunset in Kansas stirs our hearts! The light of the Sun is brilliant, beautiful, and a source of joy for us all. Even those who are blind find great joy as they bask in the light of the sun.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes proclaims, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.” (11:7).

In our reading from Psalm 36, the psalmist exclaims, “Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD. Did you pick up on the beauty that is being described here? The heavens, the clouds, the mountains and the oceans; people and animals! These are all things that we declare as beautiful. The Psalmist associates the attributes of God for the beauty in all things…for He, Himself, is ultimately beautiful.

Beauty on earth is an elusive concept, isn’t it? We are all drawn to beauty, but then beauty disappoints. No matter how close we are drawn to beauty, we can’t actually have it the way we wish to have it. We can purchase the beautiful piece of furniture, but it will eventually need to be replaced. We can purchase the beautiful painting, but we can’t have that which is portrayed on the canvas that so moves our hearts. We can listen to a beautiful piece of music, but we can’t record it or reproduce the experience of hearing it as we heard it that very first time. The mountains are beautiful, as are the oceans, but they are both deadly and uncaring for us should we venture too far.

The great Christian thinker, St. Augustine, identified what was missing. He writes that our hearts will never find their rest until they find their rest in God. Whatever beautiful thing we think we desire, what we actually desire is God Himself.

Keller writes, “The thing you love is from him and is lovely because it bears his signature. All joy is really found in God, and anything you do enjoy is a derivative, because what you are really looking for is HIM, whether you know it or not.”

So, the nature of LIGHT…the LIGHT OF GOD…The Light that shines in the darkness… is Jesus, and he is life, truth, and beauty.

II. So what is the nature of darkness?

The answer is obvious, is it not? The nature of darkness is the notable absence of light. Darkness does not have its own properties; it is defined not by what it has, but by what it is lacking. And
yet the darkness is real, for living and walking in darkness means that we are estranged from the LIGHT, which means we are cut off from the source of life, the source of truth, and the source of beauty.

What does that look like in a human life? Look again to Psalm 36: “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil.”

Those who have become accustomed to physical darkness abhor the light. Just ask my teenage son when I flip on the lights at 6:30 every morning! Those who dwell in spiritual darkness also abhor the LIGHT of God, which means they are easily swayed by lies that come from the Evil One. They have no fear of God; and as such they do not reject evil because they do not recognize evil for what it is. He is self-flattering, a liar, and deceitful. The one who walks in darkness is accustomed to hiding things, confident that his secrets will remain hidden.

But here is what Jesus said in Luke 8:17, “For all that is secret will eventually be brought into the open, and everything that is concealed will be brought to light and made known to all.”

Is it any wonder that those who walk in darkness become hostile towards Jesus? The light of Christ offends us because it reveals what we wish to remain hidden; the Truth of His light reveals our falsehood; the beauty of His light reveals our wretchedness; and yet Jesus does not come to condemn us; he has come to save us. He saves us by taking on our darkness that we might inherit his light…we are saved by grace.

As Zachariah prophesied in Luke 1:78-79, “Because of the tender mercy of our God, …the Sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Which leads us to my last point:

III. The intervention we all need.

No one likes an intervention. I have sat through a few family interventions, both in my own family and families in our church…and I can tell you with 100% certainty: no one like an intervention. An intervention is when people gather around a loved one to confront them about their condition. It’s terribly awkward for everyone…both the one being confronted, and those who are doing the confronting. Interventions are typically used to address addictive or dangerous behaviors that have come about over time, and yet the person who is addicted or behaving
dangerously seems to be in complete denial that there is a problem. So those closest to the person with the addiction join forces. They gather together and confront the person with the intent of getting the person the help that they need. Typically, the intervention includes a lot of love and affirmation toward the person, but each person in the circle strongly states their concern about the behavior that has been observed and the consequences of that behavior on their relationship.

Christmas, in many ways, is an intervention from God. When the angels sing, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord,” God is saying in no uncertain terms: things are not good. You are not OK, your behavior and attitudes are not OK, and things are not getting better. I love you, but listen: you need a Savior…all of you. You all have been walking in darkness; I have come as the LIGHT. My light will reveal what you don’t want to see. My light will hurt your eyes that have become so accustomed to the dark. But I am sending my Son…My LIGHT…to save you from certain and utter destruction. He will bring you life; He will reveal what is true; He is everything that is beautiful…He is the fulfillment of every promise I ever made through the prophets. He is the King who will save the World.”

Christmas is the intervention we all need; but like all interventions, we are left with one of two choices. We either accept that the loving intervention is for our own good and we respond with humility and a willingness to take the help that has been offered; or we deny that we have a problem and we get angry with those responsible for the intervention.

We all must decide how we will respond. Do we embrace the Light sent into the world to save us; the One who is full of life, truth, and beauty? Or do we turn away and journey deeper into the darkness?

The Light shines in the darkness…He has come to save us. How will you respond? Will you pray with me?