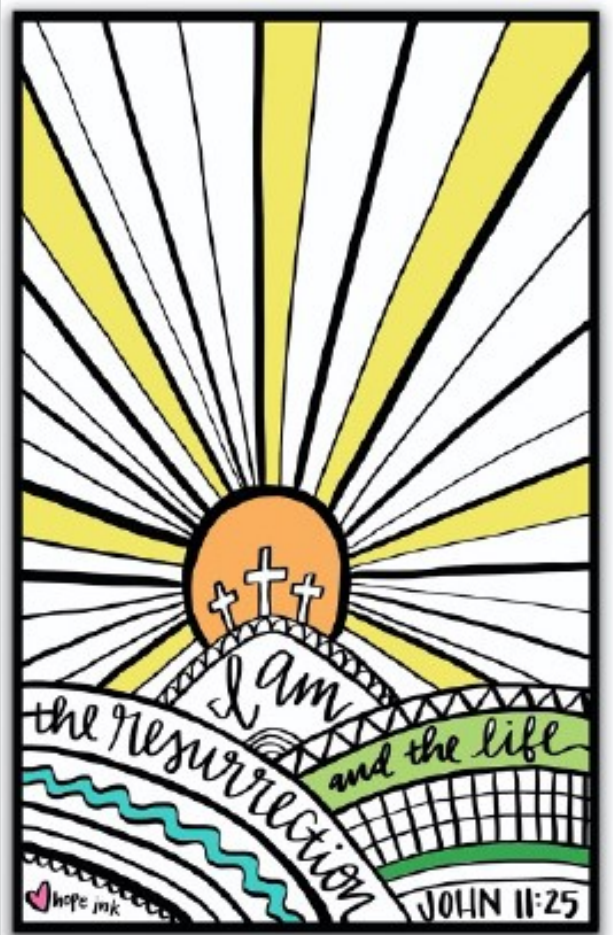


**Pastor Nathan Johnson
is inviting you to join the
Tabernacle MBC Family
in a
2021 Lenten Devotion
“Arising Son”**



“Arising Son”
2021 Lenten Devotional



Jesus said to her,
“I am the resurrection and the life. Those
who believe in me, even though they die,
will live...”

~ John 11:25

Week Five: Light Lengthens



March 14-20

Monday, March 15, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

REFLECTION: Going from darkness to light can be sudden, as with turning on a light switch, or more gradual, as with the dawn of a new day. Sometimes it's a question of being in darkness, but knowing that there is light nearby, such as when we're in a tunnel where we can see the light growing larger and brighter, the closer we get to the end of the tunnel. When there is light, we can see much more clearly, be more certain of what we're doing.

This past year has been one of great darkness, for too many reasons, chief among them the coronavirus. But now we see bright signs of hope, such as with the availability of vaccines becoming more accessible. That has been a ray of light in our darkness.

So it is in this passage of Isaiah, where God points out that people can be in the dark spiritually as well as literally. Walking around in a spiritual darkness is quite disorienting. We can't see where we are going, what we are doing. But God can shine a light in that darkness, to help us to see clearly. He does this through scripture, through the preaching of the Word, the practice of worship, through our following Jesus's example in our daily lives, which gives light to ourselves and to each other.

Lent is a time of somber reflection, a type of darkness, looking forward to the great light of Easter. We are grateful for the light that God shines on us in our dark times.

PRAYER: *Dear Lord, you are our Light in the darkness we find in this life. We thank you for shining that Light on us. Assist us in being beacons of your Light to those around us, to help bring others to You. Amen.*

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:16

"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

REFLECTION: When I was in my early 20s and straight out of graduate school, I had great difficulty finding a job in my field. It took me approximately 2 years to get hired as a counselor. I had no income and bills were mounting. As it turned out, I wouldn't have been able to physically work, anyway. During that same period, I was also having physical problems. I was experiencing severe pain throughout my entire body and could barely walk. I started going to various doctors, trying to determine the cause of my problems. Each doctor said the same thing: "you have severe Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)." I would always dismiss their diagnosis. I had seen from early childhood, the severe and painful effects this disease had on a close aunt and uncle of mine. My uncle had both legs amputated because of it and my aunt had physical deformities and was wheelchair bound for the last few years of her life. My quest for a different diagnosis finally ended one year after I began my journey, when I met with a neurosurgeon. He examined me and then asked in a matter-of-fact manner, "What is it you want me to do about your rheumatoid arthritis?" When I questioned his diagnosis, he

looked at me as if I had two heads and he asked how could I not know that I had RA throughout my body. He then proceeded to point out various indicators. That was when I finally believed the diagnosis.

I learned through this and other experiences in my life, that these difficult times which I considered dark times, really weren't dark. That's because God, the Light of the World, was always with me. As Psalm 23:4 states, "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me...." God doesn't say that we won't have difficult times, but that He will get us through them. He is always with us.

PRAYER: *Lord, please help me to remember that you are with me always and will never desert me. Help me to focus on You at all times, and not on the circumstances. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.*

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them saying "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

REFLECTION: Our journey through life is wrought with ups and downs and highs and lows! Days filled with joys, sorrows, challenges, surprises, and tragedies. How does one remain calm and stay positive and focused and hopeful with everything going on and ever changing? I believe it is our Christian faith put into practice that makes all the difference in our world outlook.

As Christians we believe in the "Arising Son" who promises us eternal life. Of course, we need to actively put our faith trusting in Jesus Christ into daily practice. During the first three months of the pandemic starting in March 2020, I forgot that God was always there with me through the darkness. I felt like I lost everything in life that had given me meaning and been so important. My job, seeing my friends and family, attending my church, my volunteer activities, my yoga classes, traveling to warmer places, eating out, seeing movies and concerts were some of the things that I could no longer do. These activities were all curtailed during the pandemic. I became addicted to watching news stories on TV twenty-four seven. I also became anxious and depressed filled with despair. I felt isolated and alone.

It took some time for me to realize that Jesus never left me! He was there with me all along, giving me the strength to get through each day and begin each new one! Though I lost the job I loved and was unable to see the people I cared about Jesus never leaves me. All I must do is call on Him and ask Him to help give me the strength to go through the challenges I am facing. I realized I still had so much to be grateful for and it changed my perspective on the situation.

Jesus assures us through John 8:12 that if we follow Him, we will have the light of life despite all the darkness around us. This passage gives me hope. We need to remember even in our bleakest hours, Jesus is always still with us. Jesus said belief in Him is the way to everlasting life. This provides me with consolation, knowing that when I leave this world, I will be reunited with my Lord and my loved ones who have passed before me.

PRAYER: *Lord, let me remember that when all seems hopeless, you are right here with me giving me the strength I need to carry on and bring me through all the darkness into your radiant light. I trust and believe in you, O God, to continue to guide and carry me through whatever challenges I am facing. You are our constant steadfast light. We need never despair or fear because you will never abandon us. You are the one truth that stands solidly in times of trouble and chaos. Amen.*

Thursday, March 18, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Romans 13:12

The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

REFLECTION: What an appropriate verse for this time of year, and for the current state of our country! We are beyond the darkness of December, when the day is at its shortest. It is a time of darkness, when many people get up before the sun rises and arrive home after the sun sets. When I was working, I was one of those people. The days of increasing darkness were, frankly, depressing, especially when the day was cloudy. The holidays, which take place during this time, are also difficult for many people, as they are not associated with joyousness, but some type of tragedy. All in all, the darkness inherent in this time of year emphasizes the hopelessness felt by many.

Although we have months to go before spring, the number of daylight hours is increasing. We can look forward to crocuses and daffodils and tulips brightening the landscape outside our windows, which has for so long lain dormant.

We can feel the increasing warmth of the sun on our faces. The fresh scent of spring fills the air and is a balm for our spirits. With all of this going on, we cannot help but be reminded of Jesus's resurrection and the hope that it brings.

As our country looks forward to another spring, it is hoped that the tide of COVID will be turned, as more people are vaccinated. The warmer weather also draws people outside, where the air is fresher and in gentle movement. We all fervently anticipate the day when our lives return to some form of normalcy.

PRAYER: *Dearest Lord Jesus, please help us to emerge from our spiritual hibernation and darkness of the soul to clothe ourselves in the light of your resurrection. Amen.*

Friday, March 19, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 4: 6

For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION: Light. Perseverance. Optimism. These are my favorite Biblical images and some of the strongest influences of Christ in my daily life. When life gets me down - as it inevitably does in big ways like the passing of a loved one or small ways like a bad day with my health - I turn to these words for peace and solace. The power of their imagery should not be a surprise. Have you ever experienced awakening in total darkness? The disorientation, confusion and eventually fear? When that happens, I immediately reach for a flashlight, a light switch or even my cell phone. When

the light comes on, I settle down and see the path forward. This is a lesson in God's power and presence in my life. When I am lost, confused or even bereft, I need to find that switch in prayer or peaceful thought or just plain calling out and then optimism and perseverance return. The tricky and wonderful part is that light shines forth from within all people because we are created in God's image.

During Lent, when we are called to add or subtract something from our daily routine. What can we do to let God's light, perseverance and optimism, shine forth through us? What can we do to recognize those God-given traits in others even others we don't like or perhaps even fear? What would the world be like if we succeeded in doing so just a tiny bit?

This past year has been a year like we have never seen. We are all hoping to see the light at the end of the tunnel, on finding that hope in our brokenness. On finding that light in the very darkness that we often find ourselves in. As we reflect on God's 'What If?... through this Lenten season, we are reminded that Jesus, who gave his life for the sake of love and peace and a more just world, is God's ultimate 'What If?...'What if the light of God's presence and glory shines in you, and through the cracks of your brokenness?

PRAYER: *Father, you are the light of this world. Thank you for giving me the light of life! Amen.*

Saturday, March 20, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:8

Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

REFLECTION: To say that the past year has been difficult is an understatement. Between the global pandemic and the racial and political unrest in the US, we seem like a people divided, trying to navigate uncharted territory. I'm tired... tired of people getting sick, tired of people dying, tired of being so isolated from friends and family. Sometimes it feels like the darkness is overwhelming and I am alone. In fact, though, the true light is already shining. Like the warmth of an early summer breeze, we need to open the doors to our hearts and minds and open the shades that keep us hidden and blind of the light that we so desperately need.

PRAYER: *Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair. Your word alone, has power to save us. Make us your living voice. Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness. Christ be our light. Shine in your Church, gathered today. Amen.*
