I have a somewhat uneven relationship with the sun. Of course, I understand that it is necessary for all life on earth, but I am not one who actively seeks it. This sun aversion could be because I have lived in such places as Fresno, South Texas, Qatar, and Kuwait. But, whatever the cause, I tend to be happier with a little overcast. Anyway, I was thinking about this quirk of mine and feeling a little guilty as I perused our Christmas readings where light is a symbolic representation of goodness, but then it dawned on me that it is not so much that I reject the sun or light in general it is more that I have some preferences for how it is delivered. That is if I am out at night, I do not want total darkness. I want to see some stars, the moon, a streetlamp or the light from the windows of a house. Even with my preference for overcast it is really just a preference for the filtration of sunlight. And I do see the need for light because in the dark the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the ceiling of the Taco Bell in Racine look exactly the same. And so with that confession out of the way here we are on Christmas Eve. We are a few days removed from the longest night of the year and our Old Testament scripture reading tells us that, “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.”

In this understanding, light is obviously good thing. We can come up with our own reasons for why light is good. Maybe it is because light can help guide us, reveal beauty, or give life. But regardless of why, the image of light that we see here in Isaiah is telling us that with the light, things will be better in the future. And I assume since you are here you know what that thing is which is going to make it all better. But just in case you do not, or you missed the *Charlie Brown Christmas Special* this year let me read briefly from our Gospel. “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’" The Christ child is the light. He will make all things better.

I want to get a little English major-y for a minute and contrast the two writing styles that we have read from tonight – Isaiah and Luke. The first one, the one from Isaiah is very poetic. In telling us that those “who walked in darkness have seen a great light” it is contrasting light and dark to convey its message but it is not meant to be taken literally – that is, we are not talking about a flashlight. The second passage, the one from Luke’s Gospel is fairly typical non-fiction writing. It answers the who, what and when of an event. It is beautifully written mind you, but the structure is that of a newspaper report. And I think having these two very different styles of writing read here on Christmas Eve is actually incredibly fitting because there are two very different things that happen on this night.

First something very human and very ordinary happened. There is a couple stuck having to travel while the woman is heavily pregnant because some bureaucrat in Rome is trying to maximize the tax potential of one of their territories. Its basically the first century equivalent of standing in line at the DMV. This is followed by something else very human and very typical – a child is born. Births are wonderful and all that, but they do happen every day. But there is a second thing that happens tonight, and that thing is not so typical. It is so non-typical in fact that in the history of humanity it has happened once. A human baby was born, but this human baby also happens to be the Messiah, the Lord. This is where it gets a little trickier to describe and is perhaps a place where a little more poetry is needed to help us understand what happened.

There is something of a human pretension that took hold in the time since the scientific revolution and that pretension is that if something cannot be perfectly explained using what is comprehensible to the human intellect then that thing cannot be true. It is the height of arrogance because it does not allow for the possibility that the fault may lie with us. That is, perhaps we are not fully capable of explaining or understanding certain things because we are feeble and frail humans. And for me that is why sometimes we need to get poetic. That is why sometimes it is better when explaining how God entered the world in terms of light and not get so bogged down with phrases like hypostatic union, homoousia and any other theological terms you want to throw in and instead talk about light entering into the world. It makes sense, even though we cannot quite explain it. We know there is something about light that conveys that all will be well. Whether it is the warmth of a fire or a lighted window on a dark night. Light communicates a deeper truth that cannot always be conveyed in words. Sometimes we need to use images to help us understand concepts like God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. These images speak to us on a certain level where wordy and overly complicated explanations fail.

Think of it like this. Picture in your head a beautiful scene. Maybe it is a stary night in the mountains. Maybe it is a town like Rothenburg an der Tauber or perhaps it is sitting by the coast watching the waves crash onto the rocks. Whatever it is, now think about how exactly you would convey the scene’s beauty in words to someone else. You could certainly describe what it looked like but at some point, you would have to rely on your description touching something unexplainable inside the other person for them to fully grasp the beauty of it all – something beyond words. I think that is what we are to experience on Christmas Night. Something wonderful and miraculous and beautiful happened on this night and we can explain something of it but ultimately it takes poetry. But not just poetry it takes all of the beauty of the Christmas season -- the decorations, the music, Christmas trees and yes it takes light -- the lights we decorate our trees and our yards with. The lights that shine in the darkness.

We can spend lots of time thinking about Christmas but on some level, we simply know that it tells us there is something greater out there. And that no matter what happens in our lives, no matter how dark things may appear there is something more wonderful. Over two thousand years ago God came to earth, not to judge or to punish, but rather to tell us that He was there and that He loves us. The great English mystic Julian of Norwich said, “I desired oftentimes to know what was our Lord’s meaning. And fifteen years after and more, I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus: “Wouldest thou learn thy Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well: love was his meaning. Who shewed it to thee? Love. What shewed he to thee? Love. Wherefore showed it he? For love…Thus was I learned that love is our Lord’s meaning.”

No, we cannot fully explain it nor can we fully grasp it but we know it is about love. The love of God for we broken and flawed humans. A love which tells us that no matter where we are, no matter what we may have done that God still loves us. That there is opened for us a way to life eternal. Christ stooped down tonight on this dark night so that we may be raised up and know the hope that comes only from him. The light has shown in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.