

The Bible Speaks

by Jeffrey E. Frantz

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house ...? Then **your light shall break forth like the dawn**, and your healing shall spring up quickly Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.” (Isaiah 58:6-9)*

When light breaks forth like the dawn. In virtually all of the *new birth/ new beginnings* narratives in the Bible, *light* is a common metaphor.

In the prophecy of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55), When Israel returns from exile in Babylon, she will be *as a light to the nations* (chapters 42 and 49). And in the above reading from Third Isaiah (Isaiah 56-66), when Israel stands with the poor and seeks to lift up the oppressed, her *light shall break forth like the dawn*.

This light, of course, points to Jesus, to the coming of the Messiah, the *holy one of God*.

In the Benedictus from Luke’s birth narrative, Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist) sounds out: *By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace* (Luke 1:78-79).

In the famous prologue to John’s gospel, we read: *What has come into being in him (Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of all peoples. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it* (John 1:4-5).

Light is such a rich symbol of hope, of the new birth and new beginnings. Always, this is at the core of the Good News we celebrate at Christmas. A *light* has come into the world that no darkness can overcome. The *light*, of course, is love; and it is a love which, at its best, draws all people in.

When light breaks forth like the dawn (from Third Isaiah above), compassion and a social conscience define the ways of God’s people. God is real clear about God’s purposes. Straight away, God says, *I don’t care about your fasts if they do not move you to feed the hungry, attend to the homeless, and satisfy the needs of the afflicted*.

In other words, apparent acts of humility, even worship, are seen by God in the wider context of love and social awareness. It is our acts of love and compassion that make a difference in the world and that promote God’s purposes.

The *light* that no darkness can overcome is the *light* that shines from the very heart of our Creator/ Redeemer God.

Illuminating the BIG PICTURE. Always, the *light* of God's love illumines the BIG PICTURE of our life-situation. In the BIG PICTURE, war is never God's way.

In Isaiah 2:4, to *walk in the light of the Lord*, is to ...

... beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

When *light breaks forth like the dawn*, in the Almighty's scheme of things, war is not an option. It is not even conceivable because the power of the *light* is transforming the hearts of God's people everywhere.

Light illumines the goodness that lives in the hearts of all nations, all persons. And where darkness raises its head (as with Al Qaeda and peoples who would make war), the *light* of God's people shines all the brighter.

In this season of Christmas, once again, as Christians, we are invited to become people of the *light*. Becoming such a people is a decision; it is a life-style. Always, as people of the *light*, we seek common ground. We seek to be bridge-builders. We seek to lift up the good in one another and to make what is *good* for the planet—for God's people everywhere—our *good*.

When light breaks forth like the dawn, greed and twisted pride become transmuted and give way to compassion and generosity of spirit.

O what a day, says the prophet! O what a day, indeed!

May this spirit of Christmas come close to us each one!