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Joy to the World!

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and heav'n and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessing flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.*

WORDS: Isaac Watts (w 1719)
MUSIC: Lowell Mason (w. 1848)
based on Handel (w 1742)

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Night of Darkness

Darkness descended over all of Egypt, a darkness such as the world had never known. "...the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—**darkness that can be felt.**" So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and **total darkness** covered all Egypt for three days.'" Exodus 10:21-22.

Darkness was the ninth of ten plagues on Egypt, and it **almost** caused Pharaoh to free the children of Israel. It took the tenth plague, the one against the firstborn, to finally break Pharaoh's proud, cruel, stubborn will.

Through Moses, God gave the Israelites the way to escape the plague of the firstborn. Very specific instructions set the time to slaughter the lambs, how to cook the meat, how to be dressed for the meal, etc. They were to kill their Passover lamb and mark their doorframes with its blood. When God saw the blood on the doorframe, He passed over that house and did not strike down any firstborn who were inside.

Egyptian firstborn died in every Egyptian household that night. Israelite failure to follow the very specific instructions given would have caused the death of their firstborn also. Obediently following the details of the God given plan was essential to their benefitting from the solution.

Darkness is dangerous! It is full of hidden obstacles. Darkness represents blindness. It is the home of bad people. Satan is darkness. Sin is darkness...darkness of the soul. Sin separates us from our Creator and will eternally claim our souls unless there is a solution. God gave the solution to our problem, just as He gave the solution long ago in Egypt.

Another instance of darkness occurred centuries after the plague of darkness in Egypt. The Son of God was born

in human form in humble circumstances. Little is written about his childhood, youth, or early adulthood. Most of what we know about his earthly life is limited to the last three years or so of His life.

Because throngs loved Him and marveled at His power, powerful Jews hated Jesus and His influence on so many. They plotted to rid the earth of Him and regain their “business as usual” existence, no matter that they were living under Roman occupation and control. Even one of His close followers, perhaps unwitting of the eventual outcome, entered into this unholy alliance.

Their evil deeds seemingly were successful when Jesus was sentenced to death on the cross, a sadistic, cruel method of execution. After about three hours on the cross, Luke 23:45-46 says, ⁴⁴ **“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,** ⁴⁵ **for the sun stopped shining.** And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* When he had said this, he breathed his last.”

Once again, God provided the way to escape sin’s death sentence for those who obey Him. Jesus became our Passover lamb and shed His blood for us. Because of His love, mercy, and sacrifice, we are set free from darkness! Jesus instructed Saul on his way to Damascus: *“I (Jesus) am sending you to them (Gentiles) ¹⁸to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light...”* Acts 26: 17b-18a.

By following His instructions, we will be “passed over” from destruction and will receive the ultimate reward—an eternal home in heaven where: **“There will be no**



more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.” Revelation 22:5. Holy and merciful is our God who provided the Lamb that saves us from

eternal death (separation from Him) and darkness! Christians are blessed to belong to God! Christians are blessed to live in the light with no more darkness!

Evelyn Waite, Rolla, MO



A Light in the Darkness

Picture yourself out in a field, on a dark night with the stars twinkling all around you. You made a fire earlier in

the evening so you could have a hot meal, and now it’s just the embers glowing in the darkness. The sheep you’ve been hired to watch over are curled up in the grass and some are softly bleating to one another. You can hear the distant brook as it gurgles over the stones in the riverbed.

You aren’t alone tonight as some of the other shepherds have tended to their small flocks and have joined you at the fireside. You will have to be watchful of the flock in case predators come in the darkness.

All of a sudden, the heavens are bursting with light! You look skyward and tremble in your heart at this terrifying event! What could it be?

Luke 2: 8-15: *“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.*

¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”



God provided a great light in a world of darkness. He sent His only Son to show us, in a way we could understand, what the love of God looks like. He lived here on the earth for 33 years, and then returned to be with His Father.

As we look around us today, and hear the news on the television, and see all the things posted on social media, let us remember that God has provided a light for a world of darkness. Jesus said in his parables that we should now be a light to those around us.

Lorna Smith, Lubbock, TX



A Sunrise

By Dean McCollum

Mere words cannot describe the exquisite beauty of an alpine sunrise, nor can they explain the lengths that some will take to experience one.

To understand my five second sunrise, go back five days. I knew I needed to carve out some time from work to go searching. I decided to work 12-hour shifts on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday so that I only had to pull a half day on Friday. That gave me my necessary time. After four very long arduous days of mechanical assembly, Thursday evening arrived. I didn't spend that evening doing something relaxing. Instead, I put my backpack together, prepared food, and studied maps. In bed by 8:00.

My alarm went off at 1:30 a.m. Sandpaper eyes, cold breakfast, hour and a half drive to the trailhead, and hiking by 3:30 a.m. That gave me about seven hours to summit my peak, find my sunrise, and be back to my car so I could get to work. Of course it was dark for about half of those seven hours. It is hard to see in the dark when you are hiking. But it was okay because I had a good headlamp to light my way. That is until the cold and exertion conspired to fog up my glasses. But that was okay, too. I did my best to let the blustery wind in around my wind jacket hood to ventilate my glasses, and this worked—at least some of the time. I continued upward.

I passed dark lakes and hidden streams, crossed slippery log bridges, and ascended past tree line. My vision seemed to stay soft and fuzzy. It was getting darker. The stars were gone, as was the crescent moon. The twinkling lights of the city far below me disappeared. I was, quite literally, climbing into the sky. The clouds wrapped their cold blanket around me. As I moved through the night, the fog got thicker and thicker until my headlamp was like the high beams on a car on a foggy night—blinding. But that was okay because the trail was fairly well defined, and I could just make out its direction. I continued upward.

It was getting colder and the fresh October snow began to get deeper. I stopped, dug out my insulation layer, and fought the wind to put it on. I retrieved my trekking poles to help me balance through uncertain ground. It wasn't long before the trail became obscured by the deepening snow and confusing jumble of rocks and boulders. But that was okay because I have a good sense

of direction, and the trekking poles would help me navigate across the rocks and boulders. I continued upward.

I was getting higher and higher, stepping from rock to rock and scrambling over boulders. But soon my feet were slipping more often. Peering through my foggy lenses, I realized that the wind had deposited verglas over the rocks. Verglas is a thick patina of ice, shaped like frost feathers, born from the moisture-laden wind. It was as if I was walking through an ice box in desperate need of defrosting. But that was okay. I would just slow down and be sure of each step. I continued upward.



When I stopped to get my coat and poles, I had removed my gloves. My hands had gotten very chilled and were now getting colder and colder. I was gripping my trekking poles, which limited my circulation, and they were more exposed to the biting wind. As I stumbled up toward the 12,000 foot pass, my fingers went from painful to numb.

I couldn't see through the dark. I couldn't see through the fog. I couldn't see through my glasses. I couldn't see the trail through the snow. I couldn't keep my footing on the icy rocks, and I couldn't feel my fingers.

I stopped.

Something in my pack would help. I sat on a rock, back to the wind, and started digging. At the very bottom of my pack, I found a stuff sack filled with emergency supplies. My idiot fingers fumbled at the drawstring, then spilled its contents down the hillside. Crawling around, I gathered up all of the items from the snow, but what I was looking for wasn't there. Nor was it in the large outer pocket of my pack, but I did



find it in an inner mesh pocket. Chemical hand warmers offered freedom from frostbitten fingers! As I was fumbling to get these pouches into my gloves, I noticed even more good news when I realized that I could see the frost-covered boulders without my headlamp. It was

getting light! My sunrise was coming! I continued upward.

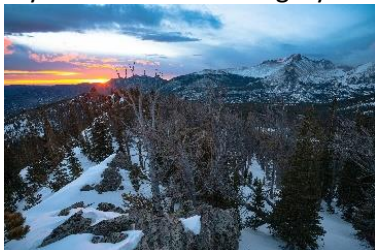
Hurrying as best I could, I left the pass and began climbing the mountain proper. I navigated past several which-way ridges, made confusing by the thick fog. Then I traversed an expansive alpine plain and made it to my summit just in time for my five second sunrise.

Of course, getting there was only half of the effort that it took—I also had to get back. Knowing time was of the essence, I took the most direct line back down and across the plateau. Enjoying the descent and the feeling of movement across the slippery terrain, I got lost in the moment. Thirty minutes later, I realized that I didn't know where I was. Setting aside the hubris of having a good sense of direction, I finally pulled out the GPS. I was way off course. I had descended further into the wilderness, was on the wrong side of the Continental Divide, and was heading toward the Pacific Ocean. Argh!

Keeping my GPS handy, I began picking my way across the fog-shrouded, featureless plain. Every time I checked the GPS, I was wandering off the wrong way. So much for a good sense of direction. I got back on route and made it to the pass where I could now see the trail in the light. I knew I had to hurry, so in spite of knowing that downhill absolutely kill my knees and the fasciitis in my feet, I took off as fast as I could, using my trekking poles to help ease the impact on my joints. They flailed madly, like the legs on the giraffe-creatures in Jim Henson's fantasy, "The Dark Crystal." I made it to my car and to work only 30 minute late.

So, you ask, why did I go to all of this effort? What about your five second sunrise? Let me tell you. The moment I stepped foot on the top of my 13,000 foot peak, God smiled down on me.

0:05: A patch of blue sky opened up above me, catching my attention from the grey world I had been encased in.



delicate shade of amber.

0:04: The whole world around me, the rocks, the snow, the little alpine grasses sticking up, and the fog...oh yes, the fog, all turned a

0:03: Without warning, a vapor cathedral burst open. Molten colonnades and balustrades swirled and danced in the sky.

0:02: The sun, an enormous orb of fiery yellow, gold, and platinum, arose and hovered at the apex of this cathedral of light. Rays of love pierced through the gloom to alight gently upon my upturned face.

0:01: I gasped, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" Not as an expletive, but an acknowledgement to the presence of the One who was smiling at me. It was a gasp of gratitude, of wonder and joy.

0:00: The gates of the cathedral closed. The way was shut. The light gone. I called out, "Bring it back! Bring it back!" But it was over. I did not see the sun again that day.

Out of all of the people who have ever lived, are living, or will live, I am the only one who saw it. Experiencing that moment was a blessing from God, His gift to me.

And I realized that mere words cannot describe the exquisite beauty of an alpine sunrise, nor can they explain the lengths that some will take to experience one.

The most awesome sunrise for any of us will be when we see that new day in the very presence of our creator.

Praying that you can find your own sunrises!

Dean

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