

**O Lord, open our eyes to see your light. Amen.**

The prophet prayed for the same thing. He said: “O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.” You see, to his servant’s eyes - it looked like they were surrounded. It looked like they were dead. It wouldn’t be much of a battle. It was Elisha and one servant against the army of the king of Aram, and that military man was not happy. Then God opened the eyes of that servant, and 2 Kings 6 records: **“The LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”**

It turned out that what looked like it wasn’t going to be much of a battle wasn’t much of a battle – but Elisha and his servant weren’t the dead ones. Actually, God used those two individuals to hand that army over to the king of Israel, to bring a great victory, a great rescue. It was just a matter of seeing what was really going on. So we pray: O Lord, open our eyes to see your light. Amen.

Right when you walk into my kids’ school, there’s a picture on the wall. It’s a picture of the school building that was taken not too long after the school opened. It’s less than a perfectly clear picture, but nice enough – looks kind of artsy. I had probably walked past it a dozen times before I noticed what it really is. It isn’t just a picture of the school. It is a collage of pictures of all of the students and teachers that were in school that year. My son’s face is on there. Things aren’t always as they seem. So we pray – Lord, open our eyes to see your light.

Because what happened to me at that school probably happens more than we’d like to admit. We see things going on – but we completely miss what is actually happening. Think about our building project. On the surface, there are times it has seemed to be a mess. We’ve seen one setback after another when it comes to the County approvals. The first site plans came back covered in red. The second set didn’t even get looked at at first because they caught something they didn’t like in how the land was divided. The DOT is understaffed so they just didn’t get around to looking at the plans for the turn lane for what seemed like an eternity. O Lord, open our eyes to see your light. God’s got a reason for all of this whether we see it or not yet. If nothing else, coming out of all this, God certainly got me to pray more.

And that’s the thing, isn’t it? We don’t always see what is really going on. Think about our Christmas story here. But don’t use the artists’ pictures. You know they have it wrong, don’t you? And I’m not just talking about putting the wise men in the scene at that manger, or the fact that it’s probably more likely that the stable was a cave. Even those artists that leave the wise men out East that night where they were or don’t really show much for the background, even those – look on page 8 in the bulletin. Do you see it? Halos – they always do that – something to show that this isn’t just an ordinary birth – this isn’t just a scene of some teenage kids far away from home, scared, poor and unprepared. They want to portray something special. But if you were walking past that cave or stable, or whatever it was where the manger was located that night – that’s what you would have seen – an ordinary scene - a hectic, confused, scary, ordinary scene.

You see, the events that went on that night say that the Christmas story IS just an everyday story about everyday events. A girl has a baby and wraps him in cloths and tries to take care of him. Every detail about that scene is ultimately common – Think of what that looked like. A poor girl, and that foolish man, staying with this pregnant woman who’s telling him she didn’t do anything wrong. They get over that hurdle and are ready to have the baby, but then the census is announced. They’re forced to move. “Why now, God?!” Think of the chaos of that trip. No place lined up to stay, no guarantee they’d make it before the baby did, no nursery decorated, no baby bed in place, no anything. And then the delivery. When you think of Christmas, do you think of a young girl screaming in pain and the man by her side telling her to push, and then breathe? That’s closer to what it looked like than the art in my house.

Or those shepherds - trying to keep their flocks alive in a pretty dry area; shepherds stuck out in the fields at night because that’s where their sheep were and that was their job. Tell *them* that the world’s greatest artists would be framing them for their masterpieces and they’d drive you away with their staff. You don’t want crazy people disturbing the sheep. “O Lord, open their eyes. Open our eyes.” And he did. The light dawned. The angel appeared, the glory of the Lord shone around them – the message was given – and suddenly, reality wasn’t anything like they had seen it before.

You know how the story goes: **“The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid (even this powerful angelic visitation wasn’t the scary scene it looked like either). Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of**

**David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”** You see what just happened? That picture of the birth scene looks a whole lot different now.

Look at how the angel points to that. Look at the sign. Look at how they would know it was their Savior. **“This will be THE sign to you** (that’s what the Greek says – this will be THE sign to you): **you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”** You’d think the sign would be the angel hosts adoring, or trumpets blaring, or the whole place gleaming with the glory of God’s presence, or the hosts holding up this child, or at least something hovering in midair – but no – THE sign of God’s entrance, THE sign of God’s promises fulfilled, THE sign of our salvation - is so common that people can just walk by it without noticing if they aren’t looking for it. And they still do. There, with likely more animal witnesses than human – God became man to save us. Not what it looks like. O Lord, open our eyes to see the light.

God did that for the shepherds, right, through those angels? He did that for Mary, too. She’s the one who said about this crazy news when she was first told- **“I am the Lord’s servant...May it be to me as you have said.”** Later we’ll read that **“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”** She saw the light. So we pray – Lord, open our eyes to see the light – and he does. He did. He brought you here, didn’t he?

Because your life doesn’t really look like the art either, does it? You know what I’m talking about? Do you send out or receive the yearly cards with the pictures? You know – either the professional picture of the family or snapshots from highlights of the year - the kids all smiling, everyone doing happy things in happy clothes at happy places. Does that card really represent what life is like? Where’s the picture that shows the chaos that went in to getting all the kids to be there posing – bathed, dressed, and holding still? Or what about the arguing in the back seat (or in the front seat) that happened in the car on the way to wherever that snapshot was taken? Or how about the way you treated one another when the other wasn’t doing what you wanted? How come those aren’t the pictures you sent out? Reading those Christmas letters would be so much more interesting if a picture were shown of what the real picture looks like. But we don’t want people to see that. We don’t want them to see our failures.

But, here’s the thing. No matter how much we hide it from others, God sees the real picture. We don’t have photoshop to be able to fix up the blemishes on real life. We don’t have the delete button on the camera of our conscience. God sees the real picture. Believe me, there’s no way my picture should make it on to God’s fridge. He wants to see perfection and all I can show him is sin. That’s the real picture.

But then, God opens our eyes with the light of his Word and Isaiah says, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”** Paul writes to Titus in our second lesson and expands on that, **“the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.”** The angel said – **“Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you – a Savior.”** It looked like a normal everyday birth because it was. God truly became one of us just like normal because he is our substitute. He was born in our place – but without sin – and lived in our place, but without sin, and died in our place to pay for sin, and rose in our place to change our picture forever. O Lord, thank you for opening our eyes. Now it makes sense to sing what we just did – *“Joy oh joy beyond all gladness. Christ has done away with sadness. Hence all sorrow and repining for the Sun of grace is shining.”* The light has dawned.

God has put light on the real picture, because he changed the picture. The picture of all of our sins has been deleted. I said we don’t have the delete button – but God does! And he has. That’s what Christmas means. That’s what we see when God opens our eyes to understand this so normal, so humble, so basic birth. It is the birth of God’s love made visible, sent to open our eyes.

Sure, circumstances and failures and stresses try to close our eyes, but let’s keep this Christmas prayer going all year long – “Lord, open our eyes to see your light.” Because he does. And that makes a difference. So when your circumstances seem more humble than you’d like – remember how the Christmas light changes what they really are, who you really are. When your failures pile up against you, remember how God sees you in the light of Jesus’ forgiveness and realize that he empowers you to live in that light. When your todo list grows and your stress level rises – Don’t get caught in the darkness of “all you have to do” but see the light of opportunity God has given you to shine that light in how you accomplish great things – many things – for Him!

Christmas might be like that picture on the wall at my kids’ school – looks nice – kind of artsy. But please, don’t walk by one more minute of this holiday and miss what it is. O Lord, open our eyes to see your light, your love, and your joy this Christmas and every day.

That only happens in Christ.

Amen.