Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness

***Lutheran Service Book* 849** | study by Paul Robert Sauer

Introduction

How would you describe yourself to a stranger? What would be the most important things to highlight? How do you boil down all of your interests and passions into just a few short descriptive words?

Who is Jesus? It is a question that Jesus Himself asks the disciples (Luke 9:18–20), and after some stumbling about Peter answers, "The Christ of God" (v. 20).

Today's hymn seeks out other biblical descriptions of who Jesus is, in an attempt to fill in the picture of "Jesus, the divine Messiah" with "Jesus, the man who walked on this earth and did great things," so that a complete picture of Jesus, who is both truly human and truly divine, can emerge.

- What images come to mind when you think about Jesus? Are they mostly divine? Mostly human? A mixture?
- Who do "others" today say Jesus is? In the face of confusing and conflicting images of Jesus, where do we go for answers?

Exploring the Scriptures

In today's Epistle, 1 Cor. 13:1–13, St. Paul speaks about how "faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (v. 13).

- Why might love be considered the greatest of these three?
- Is love simply an emotion? In what way does Jesus' incarnation reinforce the greatness of God's love?

Incarnation is at the heart of this hymn. Read John 1:1–14.

- How is Jesus' incarnation described by St. John? What image is used?
- What does this incarnation give birth to (vv. 12–13)?

In today's Gospel, Luke 18:31–43, Jesus breaks the darkness of a blind beggar by giving him sight.

- To what does Jesus attribute the man's restoration of sight (v. 42)? What does the beggar do with sight restored?

In our churches there is rightfully a strong emphasis on the forgiveness of sins offered through Jesus Christ. Read Luke 4:16–21.

- How does Jesus describe His mission (by quoting from Isaiah)?
- Is the Christian life simply about forgiveness of sin? What else is included in the Gospel (Good News) that Jesus brings?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

In 1986, Lutheran pastor Rusty Edwards (b. 1955) opened his Bible with the intention of creating a Bible study on the actual life and unique ministry of Jesus:

> What on earth did Jesus really do? As I prayed, studied, and thanked God for the life of Jesus, I began to write down some of his works. The list grew longer. Suddenly, I gazed down at the list and the list looked almost like a hymn. (Rusty Edwards, "Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness," *CrossAccent* 15, no. 2 [2007]: 39)

Edwards then set aside the Bible study and composed "Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness," a celebration of the marvelous works of the incarnate Son of God.

- If you were to describe Jesus to a friend, would you focus more on His theological importance or on His historical life?
- What do the historical life and works of Jesus contribute to our understanding of His theological importance?

Edwards titled his hymn after his favorite image of Jesus — the one who breaks the darkness in the world.

- What is your favorite image of Jesus? Why?
- Did Edwards leave out images of Jesus that you would include if you were writing the hymn? Which ones?

Text

This hymn is deeply descriptive of the life and works of Jesus. It is filled with biblical imagery. Yet Jesus is not explicitly mentioned by name until the third stanza.

- If stanza 3 were removed from this hymn, would it be as powerful? Would you still know who the hymn was about? How?

The hymn begins by celebrating the freedom that is brought by the "light" (John 1:4–9) who breaks the darkness. Out of that light comes freedom and all its benefits (described in st. 1). Read John 8:34–36.

- What is the slavery that John speaks of? Is it physical? Does it manifest itself in physical ways?
- How is creation itself affected by the freedom brought by the liberating light (st. 1)?
- Stanza 1 concludes with a reference to "the very Bread of peace." What is this a reference to?

In the second stanza humanity (the children), the spiritual realm (demons), and the whole of creation (burning sand) are made whole by the one who is "living water." Read John 4:7–15.

- Where do we go to get the living water?
- Is a celebration of Baptism present in this stanza? Why or why not?

The hymn concludes with the explicit identification of "the One" as the incarnate Word. We have been moved from table (Communion) to font (Baptism), and now the hymn concludes with a focus on the grace that table and font bring. Edwards saves the best for last. Read John 3:16–17.

- Why did God send Jesus? What is the greatest of the works done by the incarnate Son of God?
- Where is our unity found (Eph. 4:4–6)?

Making the Connection

This hymn calls to our attention the many works of the incarnate Son of God.

- What difference does it make to you to have a God who became one of us?
- How do we encounter the incarnate Word today?
- In what ways can we bring the incarnate Word to others (1 Cor. 12:27)?

In Closing

The incarnation of the Son of God has changed everything. God is not content to allow His people to live apart from Him and His presence. God continues to come to His people through His Word, through the bread of life (Communion), and through water (Baptism).

Ultimately the incarnate Word draws us back to God through His role as Redeemer, "the One who makes us one" (st. 3) both with God and with each other as fellow members of the Body of Christ.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 849.

Prayer

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayers and having set us free from the bonds of our sins deliver us from every evil; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Quinquagesima).