

Title: Shadow Line

Text: Luke 2:25-38

Nights and Days

Terminator:

Look up at the moon on a clear night and likely as not you will see what astronomers call the “terminator.” No, they’re not talking about Arnold or “I’ll be back” fame. They’re talking about the line between day and night that curves across the moon’s surface every night except when the moon is either full or new. It is the terminator that gives us the lovely sickle moon, hanging low over the horizon after sunset. It is the terminator that makes Venus a crescent when viewed through a telescope.

The earth’s terminator races across the globe at a speed of 1000 miles per hour. At the north or south pole, on the other hand, you can out-walk it – allowing you to stage as many sunsets as you wish. The earth’s terminator is more of a fuzzy grey line – blurred by the diffusion of the sun’s light in our atmosphere, and thus giving us the beauty of dusk and dawn. Except for those brief moments, we live on one side of the terminator or the other. It is only from the viewpoint of space that we can see both sides at once.

Twice each day this line between light and dark passes over us, fulfilling God’s first creation command:

Genesis 1:3-5 The Message:

God spoke: “Light!”

And light appeared.

God saw that light was good

and separated light from dark.

God named the light Day,

he named the dark Night.

It was evening, it was morning—

Day One

Day One: New Creation

The Christmas Story is the story of Day One in God’s New Creation. The world which had fallen into the perpetual night of Sin and Death, would one day see the dawn of a brand new day:

Isaiah 9:1-2 NIV

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

*² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

Isaiah goes on to describe the advent of this glorious Day One in God's New Creation:

Isaiah 60:1-3 NIV

*"Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
² See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
³ Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn."*

Christmas is the moment when the world's night gave way to the first rays of dawn in God's New Creation.

Night or Day?

It isn't terribly complicated for us to figure out which side of the terminator we're on at any given moment. All you have to do is look outside. If it's dark, then you're on the night side of the line. If it's light, then you're on the day side. Simple.

It's not so easy for us to always discern the spiritual "time of day," however. The world we live in does its best to light up the spiritual "night sky" with counterfeits for the light of God's New Creation. And when those lights fail, it's all too easy to give in to despair. As followers of the Risen Lord Jesus, we are living in the dawn of Day One in God's New Creation.

Light and Glory

Jesus in the Temple:

Luke's Christmas Story begins and ends in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Luke emphasizes the importance of anchoring the story in the Temple because God had promised through the prophets that when He did in fact come to restore Israel and cause the Light of New Creation's Day One to shine, it would be in the Temple. Malachi, writing a few hundred years before the birth of Jesus, said:

Malachi 3:1 NIV

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

A messenger would come, and then the Lord Himself. Luke tells us the story of the coming of the "messenger" in the announcing of the birth of John the Baptist to his father, the priest Zechariah. And now he tells the greater story of the arrival of the Lord Himself. He is not met with marching bands or religious ceremony. No one recognizes Him for Who He is, except on old prophet and an old prophetess. It is they who have the last word in Luke's Christmas Story!

Simeon's Song:

Luke tells us that a man named Simeon was in the Temple that day. He had long awaited the dawn of God's New Creation and the coming of Israel's promised Savior. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would live to see that day; and on this day the Holy Spirit led him to Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus. Luke tells us that he took the baby Jesus into his arms and burst into a song of praise:

Luke 2:29-32 NIV

*"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."*

Simeon had a message for both Jews and Gentiles. God's New Day was dawning not just upon His Chosen People, Israel, but upon the entire human race. This Savior was to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." And isn't that what God had promised through Isaiah when He said:

"Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."?

And what about Israel? Simeon says that Jesus' coming would be "the glory of your people Israel." Here was the fulfillment of Israel's greatest hope: that the Lord would finally return in glory to His Temple and dwell with His people. Simeon could see that in the coming of

Jesus this was beginning to happen. The Lord *had* “suddenly” returned to His Temple. God would now dwell with human beings.

John captures the return of the Lord to His Temple with these words:

John 1:14 NIV

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The words “made his dwelling” are a special reference to God making His home with His people. John came to see that this indeed happened in Jesus. Simeon recognized the Lord coming to His Temple in His mother’s arms.

Light and Glory:

The first Christians came to understand that Jesus’ coming was not merely to a physical structure built in a particular place. They came to see that in a deeper sense each one of us is now God’s Temple – the place where He has chosen to dwell. The Temple in Jerusalem was a symbol of this greater reality. In fact, isn’t that what God’s New Creation is all about? He has chosen to re-create you and me so that we can be what we were meant to be in the first place: His Temple.

Simeon’s Song reminds us that

- The privilege of being God’s Temple is now extended to all of humanity.
- The long awaited promise of God’s glory returning to earth has been fulfilled.

When we place our trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord we are born anew. We are, as Paul reminds us, children of the day: Day One in God’s New Creation.

Shadow-Line

Simeon’s Sword:

Simeon utters a second prophecy, this one addressed to Mary. Unlike the first prophecy, which announced the Good News of salvation, this message has a darker side:

Luke 2:34 NIV

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother:

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Malachi, in his promise that the Lord would suddenly return to His Temple, had gone on to warn that God's coming would have consequences:

Malachi 3:2 NIV

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.

Simeon's Sword brings discrimination between those who live in the day and those who choose to remain in the night. Jesus is the *sign* that Day One of God's New Creation has dawned. The Day has come, wanted or not. And in its light everything is revealed and shown for what it is.

Shadow-Line:

Jesus is just as much a sign for you and me today. His coming announces Day One in God's New World. In His Light we see ourselves for who we really are: no illusions or excuses. He comes to set us free from the deceptions and counterfeits of the Night. He comes to re-create us so that we can be people of God's New Day, made to reflect God's Light everywhere we go.

But in order for that to happen, we must accept the fact that the terminator between this world's dark night and God's new day has already passed over us. No turning back to the dark. No more "sleeping in" or lounging around in our pajamas. Paul reminds the Christians in Rome:

Romans 13:11-12 NIV

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let's put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

What does God have on His "to do" list for you in His New Day?