

It was not only amateur astronomer types but adults and children of all types and from all around that arose from slumber in the middle of the night, left the comfort of their snugly beds and warm homes, and headed out into the cold to ponder the night sky.

They looked up, peered at the sky, and wondered about the meaning of this portentous event in the heavens.

That night it was not the Star of Bethlehem that drew attention to a remote corner of the world but rather the dramatic darkness of a full lunar eclipse upon a winter solstice only four nights ago, something referred to as an “uber rare event,” the first time it has occurred since 21 December 1638, nearly four hundred years ago.

New York astrologer Shelly Ackerman claimed that this lunar eclipse “underscores . . . that the time we’re living in right now is extremely powerful— . . . [a] pivotal time.” She avers that the lunar eclipse is “a huge turning point for the world at large—not just in terms of world events, but [of] consciousness.” Ackerman explain that births that occur during these “rare events are signs of great success,” such as Prince William, who was born in 1982 not just on a solar solstice but also on a day of solar eclipse.”

To these astrologers, this year’s lunar eclipse is “being treated as one of those events that will bring about change in the way the world currently is”

(*Lunar Eclipse 2010: Winter solstice event a double whammy for astrologers*, <http://thsnews.com/lunar-eclipse-2010-winter-solstice-event-a-double-whammy-for-astrologers/324157/>).

Yet it is no eclipse, at least not a lunar or solar one, that arrests our attention *this* night.

Indeed, this night we have the precise antithesis of eclipsed darkness, for this night is about *light*.

Light that shines in darkness and darkness cannot overcome it.

Some seven centuries before this light shone in the darkness, the world of in which Isaiah prophesied was not so different than it is today.

Pernicious powers were arising in the world, not only seeking domination but auguring annihilation. Assyria's saber rattling had led the king of Judah to find refuge in carefully constructed political alliances in the ill-conceived notion that the weapons of war would prove to be instruments of peace.

Fear was spreading like an infection and threatened life more than any dagger, spear, javelin, or bow ever could.

Thoughts about "how vast the need was" and concerns about "how little there seemed to be" led to those who had the least need "protecting" their cherished resources from those who had the most need. A pronounced social injustice revealed a society increasingly deaf to God's word, untouched by God's presence, unreceptive of God's provision.

Freed from bondage by a God ever present with them in a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, a God who spoke to them in the Law, a God who fed them with his own hand, they had entered a land of promise. But now, years later, their hearts had hardened and they groped about in darkness, dead men walking.

What makes this kind of darkness so dark? so uncomfortable? creepy? full of fear, dread, and despair?

Could it be the absence—real or perceived—of the one who said, "Let there be light!"?

Who from a lighted bush called Moses to lead a people out of slavery into freedom?

Who in the Law gives a light upon our path?

Why is it that with hearts hardened, ears stopped up, and eyes dimmed we often seem to prefer to cast about in the darkness even while that still, small voice continues to speak “let there be light”?

So it very much was when Isaiah was sent to Ahaz, king of Judah, to confront him about trusting in political alliances rather than in his God: “Do not fear, Ahaz! Let not your heart be faint! But seek a sign from God.”

Despite Ahaz’s protestations that he should not “test God,” God provides a sign to him (Is 7.10-13):

“Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Is 7.14), “*God with us.*”

Through Isaiah, God lets us know that those who grasp for anything other than God will find themselves empty-handed, overcome by darkness.

But to those who place their hope in God, God not just “out there somewhere” but God with us, “upon them light shines” (Is 9.2).

In God alone is the rod of the oppressor broken, the wages of sin paid, the sting of death removed, righteousness established, and life bestowed:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son given and he will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ Of his rule and peace there will be no end and justice and righteousness will be established eternally” (Is 9.6-7).

Whatever these words may have meant to Isaiah, to Ahaz, and to whoever else heard them then, surely these words can find their full meaning only in the one whose birth we celebrate this cold, dark night, this child born to us, this son given to us, God wrapped in human flesh, Emmanuel, God with us.

For this child born for us, this son given to us outshines even the star of Bethlehem: in him is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

So not in eclipses, lunar or solar, however “uber rare,” is to be found the “powerful pivotal point not just in world events but in consciousness” but in the one who this night lies quietly in the manger , who confidently stretches out his arms on the cross, and who expectantly desires to wrap those pierced arms around you and me.

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, for whom there is no room for him in the inn.

This one wants nothing more this very Christmas than to find a place for himself in your hearts, to live in you eternally.