

# L I G H T

exploring the darkness in advent



The light shines in the darkness,

and the darkness has not

overcome it.



John 1:5



# Years

400 years pass between the Old and New Testament. 400 years of war, of being conquered and revolting. 400 years of silence from the prophets, of waiting for God to send this Messiah expected to deliver Israel. Think of the weariness the Israelites felt living under the mercy of the next emperor, and of the dashed hopes when leaders rose up only to be cut down. They must have wondered, 'How much longer must we live like this? Have we been forgotten? When will we be saved?'

In studying Christianity, all focus tends to be on Christ's birth. But to jump immediately from prophecy-made to prophecy-fulfilled glosses over the long, dark wait for a savior. It doesn't acknowledge the deep longing for hope, or give space to those who do feel forgotten to cry out. Advent, at its heart, is a time for questions.

How long, O Lord?

Where are you?

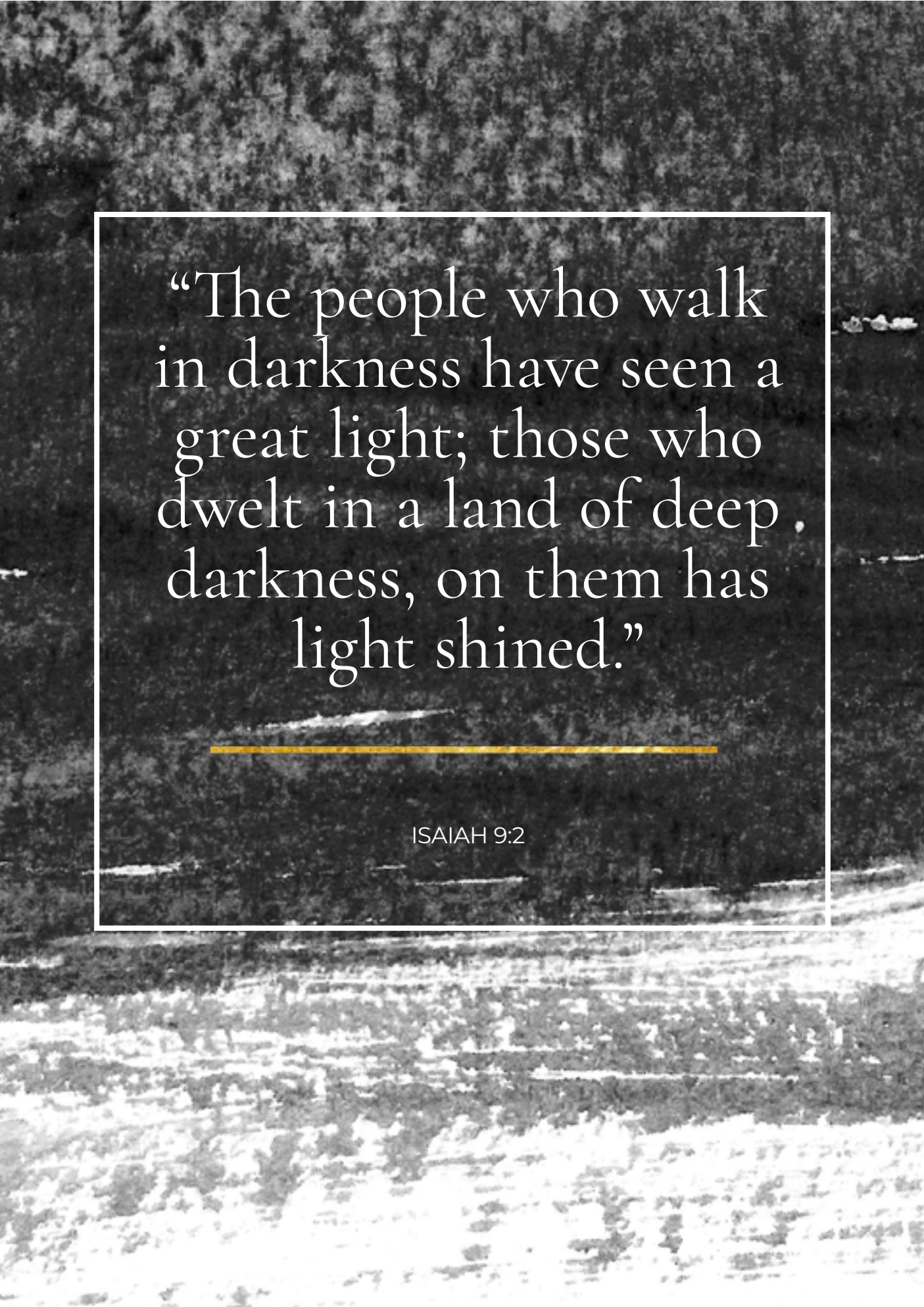
When will you come?

Advent begins in the darkness, in the place of longing. It is the silence before God speaks. It is the weariness, the heaviness from living in a world crying out for redemption. And it is in this darkness we feel the holy longing for a Savior.

Advent is not just anticipating Christ's birth, it's anticipating his return. This season, may we be a candle lit in the darkness, hope called through silence, and peace amidst the violence.

- *Read Jeremiah 31-1-14*
- *Do you think this message brought hope or frustration to the Israelites as they waited for a Messiah?*
- *When has God made you wait?*
- *What questions are you currently waiting to be answered?*
- *What promises has God made to you?*
- *Can anything positive be found in the darkness of anticipation and expectation?*
- *When do you feel the longing for a Savior most urgently?*





“The people who walk  
in darkness have seen a  
great light; those who  
dwelt in a land of deep  
darkness, on them has  
light shined.”

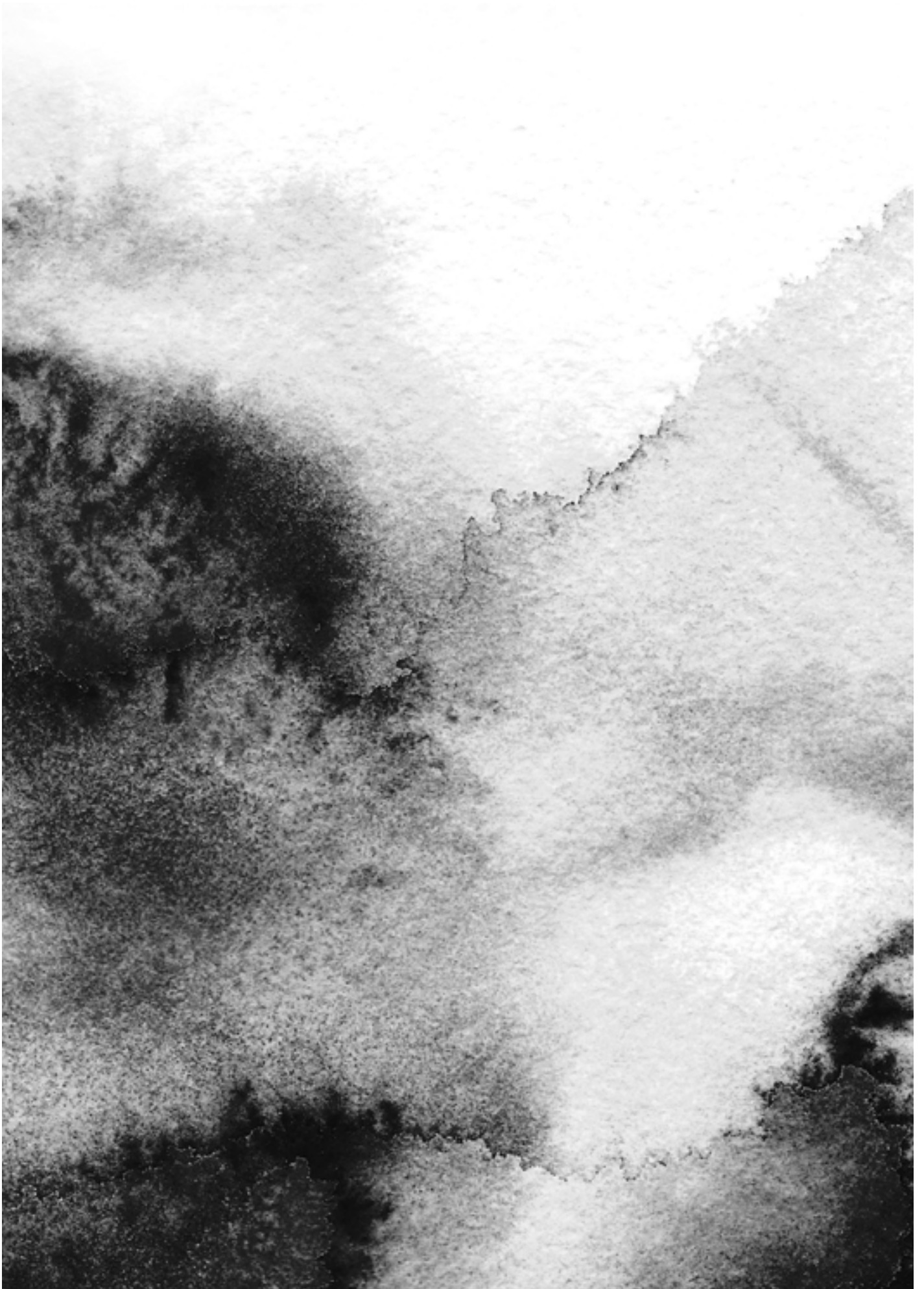
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ISAIAH 9:2

“Our whole life, however,  
is Advent—that is, a  
time of waiting for the  
ultimate, for the time  
when there will be a new  
heaven and a new earth.”

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DIETRICH BONHOEFFER





# Beginnings

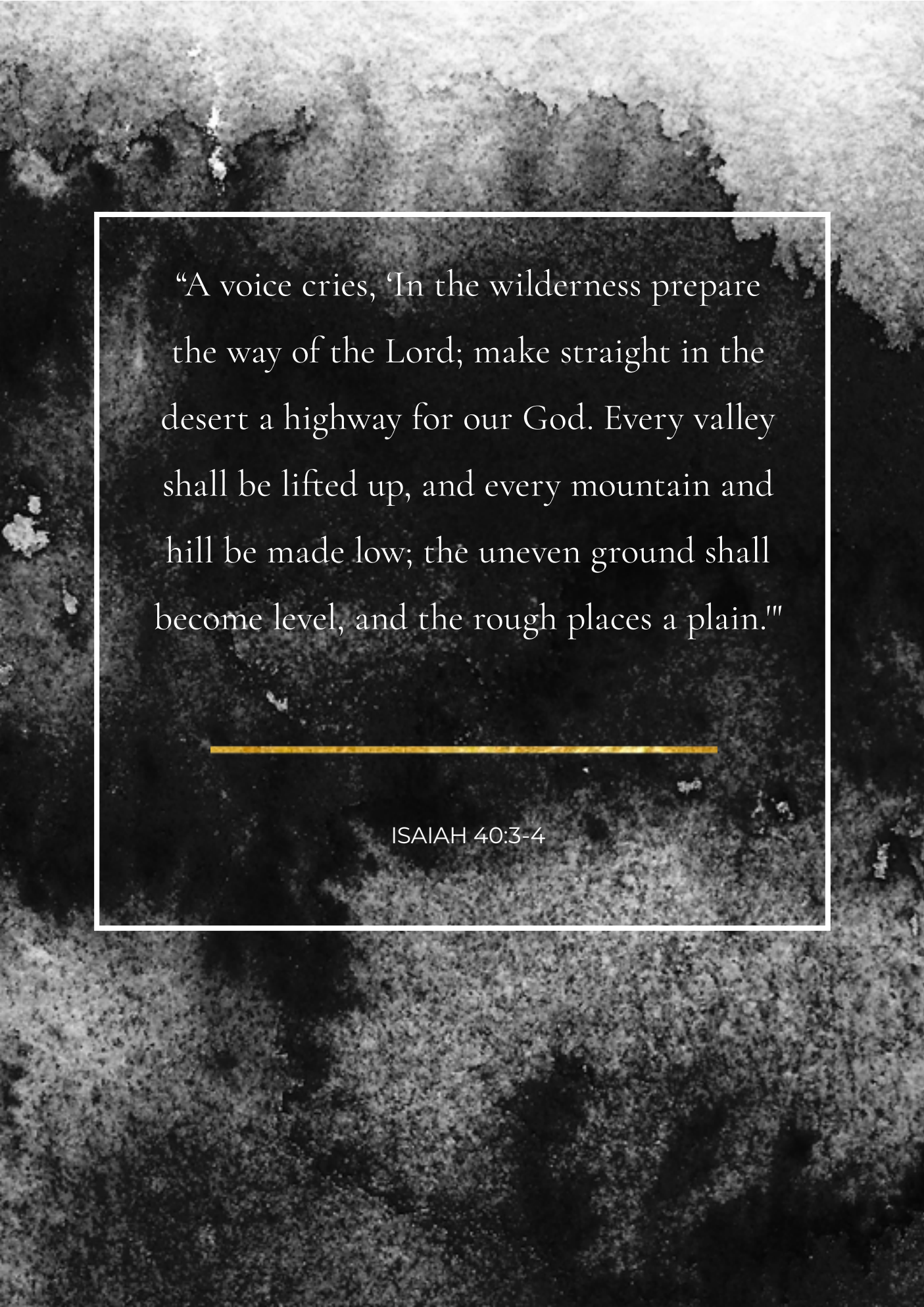
The Gospel of John starts with light. He writes about a light that brought life, that has shone through the darkness since the beginning. And he wrote that this light was coming into the world.

After centuries of wandering, darkness, and weariness, hope sprouts like a seed. This has been set in motion from the very beginning; through this light and life all things were made. In the overwhelming stress, noise, and violence, brightness cuts through. And it cannot be overcome.

In Mark, the story of Christ begins not with his birth, but with John the Baptist. Centuries earlier, Isaiah prophesied a man who would prepare the way for the Messiah, who would be a voice in the desert. John the Baptist was wild and rough; he spoke bluntly and called for repentance, but also forgiveness. He lived with one purpose: pointing others on to Christ.

When he sees Jesus, he cries, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John the Baptist lived with expectation; he waited for the one who had the power to bring forgiveness. He waited not for just a child, but a king and a judge.

- *What does it mean to wait with hope?*
- *When have you experienced hope that shone through your life like a light in the darkness?*
- *What was the Messiah promised to do? Do you think Jesus fulfilled that?*
- *Read John 1:19-34*
- *How might you relate to John the Baptist?*
- *Has God ever spoken to you through events or people you may not have ever expected him to use?*
- *When do you shine Christ's light, and when do you rest and receive it?*



“A voice cries, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.’”

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ISAIAH 40:3-4

"I cannot cause  
light; the most I  
can do is try to put  
myself in the path  
of its beam."

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ANNIE DILLARD





# Incarnate

Out of the darkness, God spoke, "Light." His first act of creation was to illuminate, bringing brightness where there was once nothing. Light drives away shadows, illuminates fears, makes clear the path. Even the smallest beam dispels darkness.

Out of the darkness of the human experience, a light was made. Out of hopelessness, frustration, and mystery, illumination came in the form of a child: from what seemed small and helpless shone the hope of the world.

Christianity celebrates the Incarnation, the act of God becoming flesh, the inexpressible becoming physical matter. He came as a lowly baby; the only fanfare was before a few lonely shepherds. The hope of the world crept in slowly, like the dawn after a long, dark night.

We always live in Advent, in the awkwardness of 'already, not yet' where we know Christ has come and will come again. We celebrate a God who has stooped to our level to save us from hopelessness, sent his spirit to save us daily, and will return to save us once again. We celebrate the light that cannot be hidden, and live with anticipation of its completion.

- *Incarnation is the embodiment of a deity or spirit; in other words, it is the manifestation of the divine in physical matter. In that sense, it may be possible to have a glimpse of this concept through a beautiful song, the view from a mountaintop, or an act of kindness from a friend. Have you ever had an experience you might describe as a sort of incarnation?*
- *What did Jesus sacrifice in becoming a man?*
- *How does the act of incarnation change your perception of God's love for us?*
- *Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15*
- *How does the incarnation change how you view your own generosity?*

"Have this mind among yourselves,  
which is yours in Christ Jesus, who,  
though he was in the form of God, did  
not count equality with God a thing  
to be grasped, but emptied himself,  
by taking the form of a servant, being  
born in the likeness of men."

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PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7

"For whose benefit did such unparalleled greatness come in such lowliness? Certainly for no personal advantage, but definitely for our great good, if only we believe. Arouse yourself, O man; for you God has become man."

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ST. AUGUSTINE







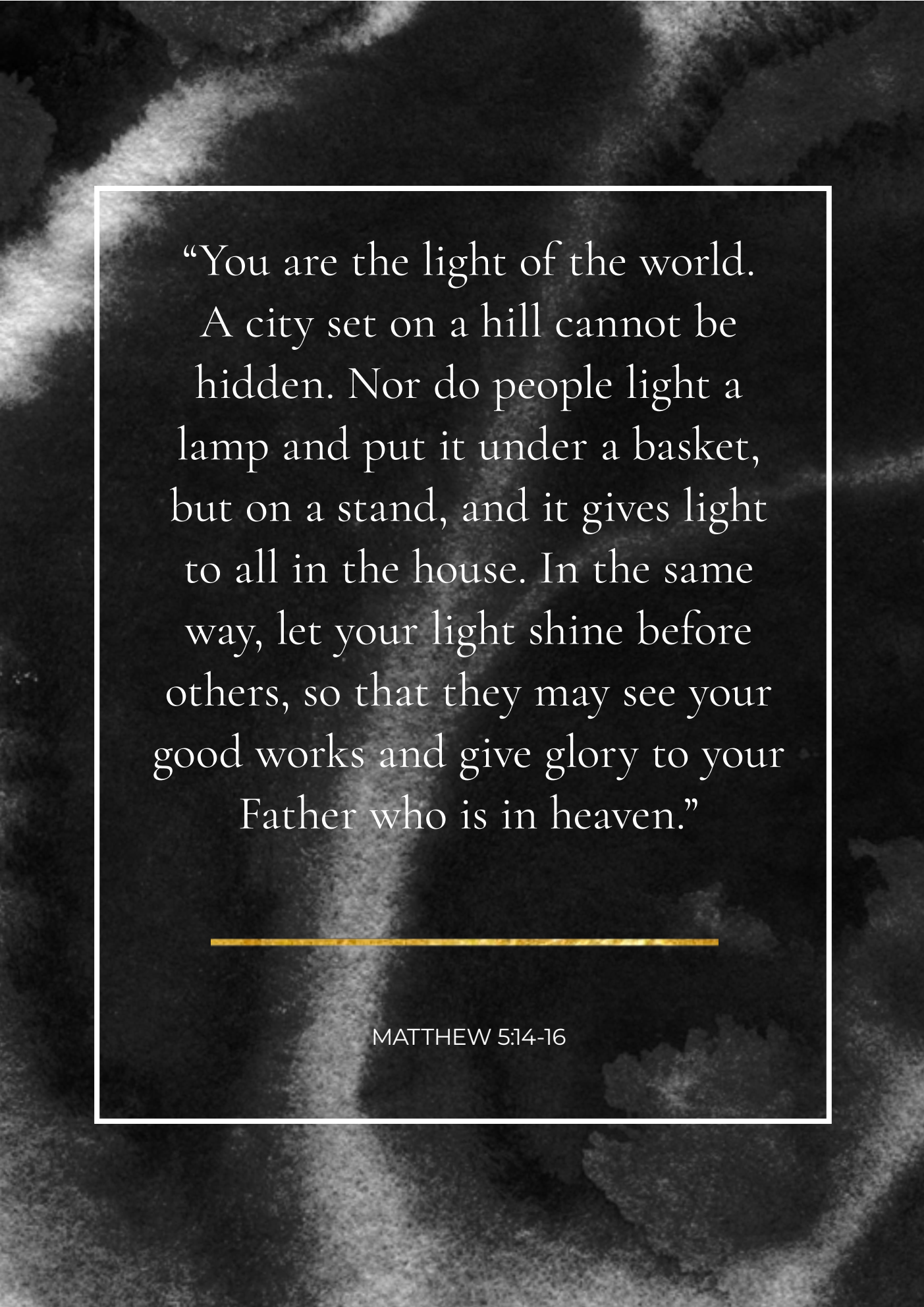
# Brightness

If something is bright, it can't help but shine on other things. The hope that came with Jesus cast such a light that no power could ever wholly darken it. Over and over again, the gospels record Jesus' declarations of dispelling darkness. It is a radical hope, a life-changing promise. The darkness of depression, of shame, of addiction and bondage has been defeated. And not only defeated, but driven out so completely that it will never have the strength to pull someone away from the love of God.

Light drives out fear and darkness, but it also exposes. Alongside Jesus' words of hope and freedom, are assurances that nothing is hidden from God and wrongdoings will be exposed. He says that people will even hate this light because it will reveal selfish motives, sinful natures, and self-righteousness.

But for those who are willing to cast off the darkness, abundant life and freedom rushes in. And the brightness of a restored life through Jesus will shine on others around you.

- *What in your life shines so brightly that it illuminates those around you?*
- *Read John 3:19*
- *How do you deal with the tension of wanting to live in the light, but feeling uncomfortably vulnerable?*
- *Does this idea hold you back from fully entering into God's presence?*
- *Read 1 John 1:5*
- *What does this mean for your life, your fears, and your hope?*



“You are the light of the world.  
A city set on a hill cannot be  
hidden. Nor do people light a  
lamp and put it under a basket,  
but on a stand, and it gives light  
to all in the house. In the same  
way, let your light shine before  
others, so that they may see your  
good works and give glory to your  
Father who is in heaven.”

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MATTHEW 5:14-16

Awake, O sleeper,

and arise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you



Ephesians 5:14

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