

*John 1:6-12*

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

*He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.*

"All the Light We Cannot See" is a historical novel written by Anthony Doerr. Set during World War II, the narrative unfolds through the interconnected lives of two main characters: the French Marie-Laure LeBlanc and the German Werner Pfennig.

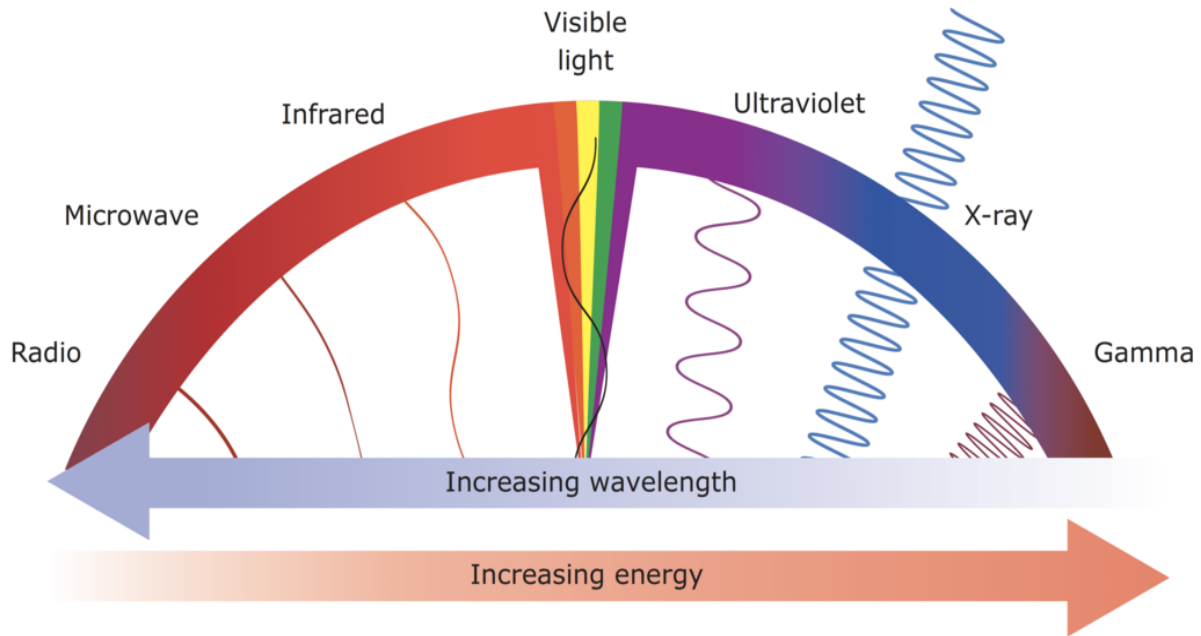
Marie-Laure is blind, and she and her father escape Paris and go to the walled city of Saint-Malo. Werner is a German orphan who ends up being forced into and trained to be part of the German killing machine. What connects the two is a radio broadcast they both listened to as children. The broadcast came from a man calling himself 'the professor' and he would teach the children all sorts of things. The war and the radio end up connecting the couple in real life. Take a look at a small part of the trailer:

<https://youtu.be/QdE-JvKqpBQ?si=CM2q8UtXtll0Gb-K>

The book and the movie weave all sorts of wonderful themes about holding on to good in the midst of evil. One of the biggest themes is light. Remember the title: "*All the Light We Cannot See*." Marie-Laure is blind from birth, but she is the most lit-up, intelligent, good and beautiful person in the book. Some recognize the light in her. Her father in particular always saw the light in her. The Nazi regime (that saw anyone with a disability as being inferior) not only do not know how brilliant she is but see her as a threat and try to destroy her. Light is also found in Werner who has been trained to destroy and kill, but thanks to the radio broadcast holds on to the light.

I only took as much physics and science as I had to in high school, but we know today the light we can see is a tiny fraction of the electromagnetic spectrum. Of all the types of light, there is only a small selection that we as humans can see. We call that

## the *Visible Spectrum*.



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Light has a property called *wavelength*. Light can have any wavelength more than zero! Humans can see in the range of *approximately* 700 nanometres (red) to 380 nanometres (violet).

There is plenty of light that we humans can't see! The neat thing is that the book plays on this science. Another wavelength that helps people to "see the light" in the book is the radio. Through the radio the children learn and are connected to amazing things. In one broadcast the children hear the professor saying: "*The brain is locked in total darkness, of course, children,*" says the voice. "*It floats in a clear liquid inside the skull, never in the light. And yet the world it constructs in the mind is full of light. It brims with color and movement. So how, children, does the brain, which lives without a spark of light, build for us a world full of light?*"

This is reflected in today's scripture reading:

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.*

How is it that the Light of the world could come to earth and people not see it?

There is an evil in the world that works to blind us and destroy us.

Where is this evil? Last week Rev. Donald gave a profound sermon and service that reflected in part on King Herod and the killing of the innocents.

We can look to what is going on in the Middle East. I tell you; I watch movies about Nazi Germany and the resistance with a new light as I see a nation trying to totally destroy Palestinian people. But we don't have to look that far. We see it here, where addiction steals the lives of people. We see it here, in our own heart, where fear and worry and denial lead us to self-destruction and to not loving ourselves and not seeing the humanity of others.

John the Baptist saw the evil and he saw the light. His whole life was committed to pointing people towards the light and to preparing the way.

Baptism was one of the ways he did that.

The vows that our new members will take today are in part very old — vows to renounce evil and to turn to Jesus.

Baptism and the vows of membership are a beginning of a new life. They are how we say 'No!' to the ways of life that are killing us and killing our earth and our fellow human beings. And they are how we say yes to Jesus. 'Yes!' to the one who saves us, who gives us life, who reconnects us with the Creator. A life of Love.

Yesterday, in the church calendar, was Epiphany. Epiphany lifts up the story of the Wisemen who traveled from a distant land, guided by a star to find the precious newborn king, found in a most unlikely place. Yesterday I also presided at the funeral service of one of our dear members of the church, Dr. John Taylor.

Epiphany seemed like a very fitting day to hold Dr. John's funeral. He was so incredibly smart and wise. I don't think we ever conscripted him to play the part of a magi in our Christmas pageant, but we should have — it would have been a perfect typecast! Dr. John was a medical doctor specializing in Internal and Nuclear medicine and was the Chief of Staff at the hospital in Lennoxville. I have a doctorate, but I feel like an idiot and a total underachiever when I hear about all of John's accomplishments. Not just his education and specialties — he was very accomplished in music: playing the piano, organ, bag pipes and harmonica! He was a gardener and built canoes by hand. He was also a pilot and a gifted sailor. (I wish I'd known, having just gotten into sailing myself!) John was a celestial navigator, just like the wisemen! They read a poem at the funeral called "Sea Fever" and these are the opening lines:

*I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,*

*And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by.*

He was an exceptional man. All through his life John learned not just to be guided by the stars that we can see with our eyes, but also to be guided by the Bright Morning Star, as Jesus describes himself in the in the book of Revelation — the star that is so bright you can see it just before the dawn — that light, in a sense, that prepares the way for a new day.

John the Baptist helped many to see a light they couldn't see before. He expanded their field of vision so they could follow the light.

*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.*

I think if we could see how big and how powerful the love of God is for you and for the world, it would change us. The darkness seems so big ... but that's not the truth. The truth is *there is nothing more powerful than love.*

A song is woven throughout the movie "*All the Light We Cannot See.*" The professor began and ended his program with the piano piece "Claire de Lune" by Debussy. Marie-Laure continues to use that song when she begins to broadcast for the resistance. When they hear that piece of music the characters are flooded with hope. In the middle of the destruction and evil of war there is beauty and hope that can never be destroyed. The English translation of "Claire de Lune" is "Moonlight." What is moonlight but a light that shines in the night?

We don't often play classical music, but it is a very beautiful piece and I've asked Samia to play it as our reflection song. While she plays, I want you to pray and bring to God whatever is dark or worrying or destroying in your life or in the world, and I want you to ask God to show you love, light, and hope. Picture that light flooding your life and our world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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