

December 2, 2018
The Light Shines in the Darkness
John 1:1-5

Imagine you are in a completely dark room, perhaps deep in a dungeon. In the darkness you can see nothing. It's freezing. You can hear every noise. You are afraid.

Darkness is a picture for life when things are bad. Psalm 23 speaks of walking through the valley of shadow (Darkness) of death. Back in the days of Isaiah, "*The people who walk in darkness*" are seeking a great light; "*those who live in a land of deep darkness*" are waiting for a light to shine (Isaiah 9:2). "*Being in the dark*" about something implies we are confused or lost.

There is something incredibly human about being uncomfortable with darkness. As children we may be afraid of the dark. As adults we may still feel panic when all light is gone. Darkness prevents us from seeing our surroundings and from finding our way home. In the dark we bump into things, we hear things, we imagine things ... Darkness "feels" cold. The bad side is the dark side. Darkness is just so ... dark.

Imagine you are still in that completely dark room. What is going to help you? Now imagine there is a tiny window high in the wall. Suddenly a star begins to shine through that window. Or perhaps the moon. And everything changes. You can see – if only a little bit. The noises of the night seem to retreat. You have glimmer of hope. You feel a tinge of warmth. "*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that,*" said Martin Luther King, Jr. He is right, isn't he?

If darkness is a metaphor for evil, light is a metaphor for good. The good guy is dressed in white and rides the white horse. White is the symbol of purity, holiness, and hope. When we "see the light" we feel safe; we know where we're going; we sense warmth and love. At this time of year, there is nothing as warm and inviting as candlelight, Christmas lights, or a cozy, dancing fire.

"God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all" says John (1 John 1:5). *"The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?"* (Psalm 27:1). *"The Lord is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favour and honour"* (Psalm 84:11). The prophet Micah looks forward to the Messiah, saying, *"Do not gloat over me, my enemies! For though I fall, I will rise again. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light"* (Micah 7:8).

John is fascinated by this metaphor of light – God's light, Jesus – coming into a world of darkness, a world that does not know Him.

"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind" (1:4).

Jesus is God Himself come among us. He is fully God (along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit), who works together to bring everything into being. Is this important? Absolutely. The **God** of light and life has come among us. The all-powerful One has come among us. He will live through what we live through. He will be tempted as we are tempted. He will experience what we experience.

The all-mighty, all-knowing, all-wise God has lived among us. He knows. He understands. The writer of Hebrews muses, *"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted ... we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin"* (2:18, 4:15). *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need,"* he continues (4:16).

Are you in darkness? Are you troubled? Are you in need? The God of the universe – the God of Light – is able to empathize. He has been in the darkest places, too. And having been there, He can bring light into our darkness, hope into our despair, peace into our loss, love into our bitterness, patience into our anxiety, and comfort into our sorrow.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"
(John 1:5).

The light, the love of God, is more powerful than the darkness you face.

It's interesting to reread Luke and Matthew's accounts of Christmas, looking for "light." Luke notes the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks at night (darkness) when the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and *"the glory of the Lord shone around them"* (light). An English teacher could have all sorts of fun playing out the symbolism of the shepherds' darkness (poor, with no hope, short, dark lives) finding light (loved by God, with hope of an eternity with Jesus). They went back "into the darkness" of the night but a light was lit in their lives that the darkness cannot overcome or extinguish.

The shepherds, *"spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them ... The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told"* (Luke 2:18-20). A new light burned within them.

The magi came, following a star (in the darkness, following the light). They come in darkness (with no knowledge of the true God) finding the true light in Jesus: from spiritual darkness to spiritual light. As they worship Jesus, they worship what their souls long for; they find light. They went back into a dark world that did not know Jesus but a light was lit in their lives that the darkness cannot overcome or extinguish.

The magi, *"returned to their country by another way"* (Matthew 2:12). Matthew undoubtedly meant by another road. But they were also transformed by meeting Jesus. Their "way of life" was changed by Jesus. Light had come into their (spiritual) darkness.

In the darkness of their/our world, the light of Jesus brings hope and healing, life and love of the kind we have never known before. Notice the darkness isn't magically gone. God doesn't instantly destroy all the evil, eradicate all the cancer, or solve every problem. But He does shine through it. He shows us a way through it. He gives us the hope we need. He gives us the peace we need. He gives us the joy we need.

That is good news. That is practical good news for us today. The God of Light loves you, understands you, and can get you through the dark places.

"To all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God ... born of God" (1:12-13).

John deliberately creates a parallel account to Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth – but Word – Jesus – already was. Then God created light. Jesus – the true light – already is.

John is helping us see that significant as God's creation of the universe is, Jesus is even more significant, because He already was God and (in the mystery of the Trinity), was with God. Jesus' coming is a reboot of creation. A whole new beginning to the order of things. A whole new start to the relationship of God and His people – us.

It marks an end to an era in which people are in darkness, separated from God by an uncrossable divide, and the dawn of an new age in which we can come directly into God's presence. It marks an end to a nighttime of fear, guilt, and shame because we all fall short of the glory of God, and the sunrise of an age of mercy, forgiveness, and love.

Christmas is about God loving His world so much that He gives His One and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Everlasting life is NOT just about life with Jesus after we die (though it includes that). It also means life with Jesus **now** – today and every day, this moment and every moment.

"I am the light of the world," says Jesus (John 9:5). Then, as a practical expression of this, He miraculously heals a man born blind. This man really does receive the gift of light. But it's a metaphor spiritual darkness/blindness and spiritual light/sight as well: *"I have come into this world, so that the blind will see,"* Jesus concludes (9:39).

Walking in the Light

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him

there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"(1 John 1:5-7). We are invited to the Light? Will we come?

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us ... If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world"(1 John 1:8-2:2). God loves us. Through Jesus, He forgives us. He offers us life – new life – with God. It's the greatest possible Christmas gift. Will you accept it?

Our calling, then, is to "walk in the Light." *"The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them"*(1 John 2:8-11).

Martin Luther King, Jr. did say, *"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that."* His quote continues: *"Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*

Good News of Great Joy

Christmas is about Good News of great joy for all people. God has come among us. He has rebooted creation. He has recast our relationship with Him so we can come into His love, freely, and completely. *"I am the light of the world,"* says Jesus. *"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"*(John 8:12).

His desire is to shine in our darkness so we live as children of the light. That gives us hope and help. *"You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness"*(1 Thessalonians 5:5).

More than that, His light shines through us so we are light of the world. *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"*(Matthew 5:14-16)

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