

## The Real Christmas Light John 1:1-18

What do you appreciate most about this time of year? For some of you, it's snow. For others, it's family gatherings. And maybe for some of you, you even appreciate Christmas. What I appreciate most this time of year is light, maybe because it's so dark. What I really appreciate the most is the winter solstice, because it marks the day when the light of day is returning and the darkness of night will wane.

I think that's why Christmas was placed on December 25<sup>th</sup>. We honestly don't know when Jesus's real birthday is. But long ago, the church chose a season of darkness to celebrate the light. We have yule logs and advent candles, Christmas tree lights and even Bright Nights at Forest Park. But it's not only our idea to celebrate light in the dark season. If you look at the scripture, it is replete with comments about light. It's at this time every year, on the Day of Epiphany, when we hear from Isaiah "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. (Isa 60:1) And, sometimes we hear Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, proclaim "With the loving mercy of our God, a new day from heaven will dawn upon us. It will shine on those who live in darkness, in the shadow of death. It will guide us into the path of peace." (Luke 1:78-79) And Simeon, when he blessed the infant Jesus, said, "He is the Light that will shine upon the nations, and he will be the glory of your people Israel!" Luke 2:32

Even as we look at the story of Christmas there are signs of light all around us. Luke, who was concerned for the lowliest and least in society, tells of God's revealing light to the shepherds, "living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified" (Luke 2:8-9) And Matthew, who was intent on revealing God's faithfulness to Israel told of wisemen who saw a star in the east and by its light were guided to the city of Bethlehem. (cf. Matt 2:2,9)

But then, then we turn to John. And we may think 'John doesn't have a Christmas story,' but he does. It doesn't involve stars or manglers, angels or wisemen, but it's there. John does not focus on one particular night when a baby is born. Nor does he look back to father Abraham, like Matthew, or to the first man, Adam, like Luke. Rather, John chooses to go back to the very creation, to God himself. In the beginning- just like Genesis; in the beginning God (Gen 1:1). And yet, more than even Genesis, John takes one step further back - not to when God said, let there be light - but before God spoke there was the Word, the one who was the life and light of all people. This one was not just a light, but the very presence of God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, a living breathing man. The true being of God came to us in human flesh, in a way we can see and touch and understand. (see 1 John 1:1-3) And we have seen his glory. (John 1:14)

It was a stunning, marvelous revelation of the glory of God. But God did not come as a human being just for a lark. God knew we needed more than the beauty of the earth to reveal his fullness. We needed more than the law and the prophets to guide us. God recognized the depth of darkness and chaos that was around us, just as in the beginning. And God, in his love, intended to form a new creation, just as he had always planned, from the very beginning of time. Before the formation of the world, God chose us to be his beloved children in Christ, (Eph 1:4) and beyond us, all of creation looks forward to the future when God's children appear in their full and final glory. (Rom 9:19)

We ourselves also longingly look for that day when God's desire comes to its fruition, because we keenly see and feel the darkness that still surrounds, whether our own struggles or the world's darkness. In conflict and hatred and violent storms and natural disasters we know the darkness. We sense the chaos and loss of

homes and families, hope and peace. Darkness is at our doors in the in the hunger and homelessness of the poor, the loneliness of the elderly, the pain and fear of the abused, and the suffering of the ill.

Yet here is God's answer. I am here. I am with you. God has never turned away, never given up. No, "the light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness can not extinguish it." (John 1:5) That light of God is our hope and our strength. By that light, we begin to see not just Jesus Christ and all this glory, but who God has made us to be, "to all who believe in him, God gave the power to become the children of God." (John 1:12) In him in Christ, we see all we are meant to be, and we will become like him as we grow in faith and hope and love.

This is the good news of the gospel, and it is our guiding light as followers of Christ. We are to bear the beams of God's love and light and life to the world, especially to those who would not otherwise see it. Your own life is a Christmas gift from God to the world, a bit of revelation through the light of Christ that is in you. Remember Jesus boldly told us "You are the light of the world. ...Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14a, 16)

So, then, if in these days you have 'packed away Christmas till this time next year, You may want to reconsider. Christmas was not the end of Christ's life, but the beginning. It was the beginning of his ministry. To bring about life and light hope and joy to those in need. And Christmas does not end for us on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Christmas is a celebration and it is a beginning. As Howard Thurman reminds us.

"When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among others,  
To make music in the heart."

And most especially, as John would say, to make known the light of life.

May the light of Christmas shine brightly through our lives, to the glory of God. Amen.