

AWAITING THE ALREADY
Advent Worship Series – Week 4
The Light in the Darkness
December 20, 2020
The Word Became Flesh

Call to Worship:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John 1:1-5, 9-14, NIV)

The Nature of Christ's Light

Choric Reading:

Reader 1: This is not just any light. This is God's light. And God's light can do something that no other light, natural or fabricated, can claim to do: God's light doesn't create shadows.

Reader 2: It goes against every property of light, every principle of physics ever learned. Natural light creates shadows when obstructions are in the way. God's light shines through, even when the obstructions of life appear. John's Gospel says it in its poetic, simplistic best.

Reader 3: The light came into the world, and the darkness didn't have a chance.

Reader 1: What kind of light is this? It is not fabricated holiday light, with shopping lists and tinsel wrap. That light creates shadows that only amplify our misery. This light is the light of a God who came near to be with us.

Reader 2: What kind of list is this? It is not the light of unfulfilled hopes and dashed dreams. That light creates shadows and fills us with remorse and bitterness. This light is the light of a God who fills us with the eternal hope of the kingdom of heaven.

Reader 3: What kind of light is this? It is not the light of vengeful war and attacks on our enemies. That light creates permanent shadows and hollow victories. This light is the light of a God who lifts up an irrational vision of peace.

Reader 1: What kind of light is this? It is not the light of fabricated cheer and festive escapism. Those memories will fade, and so will their benefits. This light is the light of a God who says, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10, NIV).

Reader 2: What kind of light is this? It is the light that says you are not alone. You do not suffer in solitude. You have a companion for your journey. You are joined by One who breathed your air and walked your sod. One who cried your tears, felt your anger, wrestled with your temptations, and felt the sting of saying goodbye.

Reader 3: This companion is Emmanuel. And God is still with us.

Reader 1: For now, that is enough. It is enough to affirm that God has come to identify with your humanity, feel your pain, and accompany the lonely steps along your path.

Reader 2: God is with us—with you—to be a light that shines through your obstructions. God gives you hope that will not fade, peace that will not be understood, love that will not let you go, and joy that will not create shadows.

Prayer/or Pastoral Prayer

Who is this child? Who is this Wonderful Counselor? He is a man who has walked in our shoes, felt our pains and struggled with our temptations. Moreover, he walks with us now, every step of the way. How could we not love him? O Light of the World, prophesied deliverer of Israel, you have truly come. You are my deliverer and the light of my world as well. With joy I acknowledge your right to every righteous and holy title and to every place of authority. Come, Lord Jesus, Messiah, and rule over us with justice and peace. Do it even now in me. I welcome you gratefully to the throne of my life. Amen.

(The NIV Worship Bible, p. 909)

(Awaiting the Already, pp. 73-74)

The Proclamation of Love Candle

Lighting of Advent Candle

Reader 1: ¹⁰ “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:10-14, NIV)

[Light first (purple) candle]

Reader 2: As we relight the candle of Preparation of Peace, we remember the voice crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

[Light second (purple) candle]

Reader 1: We relight the candle of Expectation of Hope, recalling God’s promise to send a Savior.

[Light third (pink) candle]

Reader 2: We relight the candle of Revelation of Joy. We celebrate the announcement of the coming King and the greatness of God’s love revealed through the Christ child.

[Light fourth (purple) candle]

Reader 1: Now we light the candle of the Proclamation of Love. We celebrate the announcement of the coming King and the greatness of God’s love revealed through the Christ child.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for revealing yourself through Jesus, and we praise you for the greatness of your love. Help us to share your peace with others and live our lives more like Christ every day. In His name we pray. Amen.

AWAITING THE ALREADY
Advent Children’s Moment – Week 4

December 20, 2020

The Light in the Darkness

by *Martyn Scott Thomas*

[Call the children of the congregation forward and have them sit around the Narrator's chair.]

Narrator: Today is the fourth and final week of Advent – the four weeks before Christmas. For the past few weeks we've been talking about different parts of the Christmas story. Last week, we talked about some of the songs of Christmas. Today, we're going to talk about light and darkness.

What do you like better: light or darkness? *[get responses from the children]*
Is anyone afraid of the dark? Why? *[get responses from the children]*

It's always easier to see what you're doing if the lights are on. When it's dark out, it's easier for people to hide what they're doing. What are some things people might try to hide by doing them in the dark? *[get responses from the children]*

When *Jesus* was born, the Bible tells us that his life brought light to everyone, and that his light would shine in the darkness. And even though he was the Light of the world, a lot of people still liked the darkness, because they could hide in the dark. But we know that it's better to live in God's light than to hide in the darkness, right?

Let's pray. Dear Jesus, we thank you that you are the Light of the world. We thank you that we don't have to be afraid of the dark because you are always with us. Bless us today. Amen.

[dismiss the children]

AWAITING THE ALREADY

Advent Sermon – Week 4
The Light in the Darkness
December 20, 2021

By Captain Kristina Sjögren

Title: *The Light in the Darkness*

Scripture: John 1:1-18

[*Personal illustration:*] Have you ever seen the great Charles Dickens story, “A Christmas Carol,” on stage? There are a number of moments that will take you by surprise, even if you know the story well. For instance, when Jacob Marley’s ghost first appears! I remember seeing it with my family, and we were seated in the third row, close to the speakers. As Marley appeared, there was a bright flash in the darkened theater, then a strobe-light action. Marley’s character came in with not only a loud bang, but with jolts of light that were blinding for a few seconds!

Today we are talking about Light in the Darkness, found in John 1. Light is an important part of our Christmas celebrations. Not only do we light the Advent candles each week and go to candlelight services on Christmas Eve, but everywhere you look there are lights glowing from windows and in yards and on trees. At the darkest time and the shortest days of the year, there are lights to brighten up our neighborhoods.

Even before modern day electricity, the angelic glory of the Lord shown around the shepherds out in the fields at night and the light of the ancient star led the wise men to Jesus.

The emphasis on light doesn’t come just from the stories of the angels, shepherds and wise men in the other gospel stories, but from the basic Christmas message of the Light that came into the world through our Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Even Isaiah prophesied, “*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned*” (Isaiah 9:2).

The Gospel of John also tells us that God’s light which was present at creation has come into the world in a new way. His story is quite different from the stories that Matthew and Luke share about the actual events of the coming of our Messiah. John 1:1-5 speaks of the Word that became flesh. He speaks of how He lived among us and that He was born so that we might see the light in the darkness.

This light is different than any other light we know. The light of God shines with amazing characteristics. We see in verse 9 that it is not just a bright light, this light is the true light. If we look at other passages in this Gospel, the true light stands in contrast not just to false lights, but to lights that are less bright. In other words, prophets and those who also show the way to the One who is Light of the world.

Jesus comes as the abundant, final light, the true light which supersedes any partial or flickering lights like John the Baptist or Moses. Not that they weren't good lights (they were provided divinely), but they are not *the* Light of life.

Also, the true light gives light to every person, and has the power of being the light for the entire universe. God is the giver of eternal and everlasting life and light.

So then, I think it's interesting when John says in verse 5 that there are those who do not understand or recognize it. This portion can actually be translated in a few different ways, but in Greek the word for "comprehend" or "understand" is *kä-tä-läm-bä'-nō*, which means "to lay hold of so as to make one's own, to obtain, attain to, to make one's own, to take into one's self."

It's kind of like a fog settling. Imagine fog covering the earth when all of a sudden, someone starts sharing about this man who can dispel the fog totally, and there are glimpses of light beginning to shine through. John is like a fog-light before the sun comes up fully to dispel the fog and the darkness around it.

Look at John 1:4-9 with me. It says, *"⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world."*

In these verses, when people see the light, they don't really get it. They don't apprehend it fully and they can't overcome it, even though they would like to if they could. It's kind of like someone coming into the room when you're sleeping in the middle of the night and switching the lights on (reaction to sudden bright light).

So, we learn about John the Baptist and his part in introducing the light to others. John was completely separated for God's purpose and lived a life that was holy, pure, set apart. He didn't want anything or any activity to hinder his ability to preach God's Word.

He was not the *true* light, but he was sent to bear witness of that light and to help others understand the light that provides life. He introduced the true light which gives light to everyone coming into the world.

I appreciate the way John writes this story. It's not your traditional Christmas story, but it is the story of Jesus as he is clearly sharing the message of the light that has come.

Can you imagine hanging out with Jesus? And after a period of time, you wonder, "Who is this guy, and where does He come from?" Then it dawns on you one day that He is everything that Scripture foretold!

I imagine this writing is John's revelation in his own life. He has to write about it. The Word became flesh, the incarnation. *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

We see another analogy of light and darkness in verse 17. The written law was given through Moses and while we know and understand that the law is important, the law itself is not the light we need. It isn't evil or the culprit either. Sin is what provides the darkness in our lives, but the law is not the light in our lives.

This is where John reminds us that grace and truth and light come through Jesus Christ. He is grace! He is the light! We are no longer under the law, but under grace. According to verse 12, when we believe in Him, we have the right—because of God's grace through Jesus Christ—to become children of God. We no longer need to live in darkness and sin but in the light of God's grace. AMEN!

John's mission was simply to reflect that light in his life to others, sort of like the light of the sun reflecting off of the moon. John was a glimpse of radiance in a form that humans could comprehend. We too can reflect the light of Christ for others so that those who walk in darkness can experience the light of God, Jesus Christ incarnate, in us.

To experience the fullness of God's glory would be like staring directly into the sun. It would give little benefit and maybe even cause harm to our physical eyes. That's why Moses was only given a glimpse of the effects of God's light.

So, we look to those who have gone before us, like John the Baptist, St. Francis, or someone more recently, like Mother Theresa or Billy Graham, and see their faithfulness and example that have paved the way for our own life of faith.

We too have the responsibility to reflect that same light for others. "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name," (v. 12), we can share it with others, so that those who live in darkness can see the glory of God.

Here are three things to consider as we wrap up today:

1) Some people live under the fog or cover of darkness because of shame, sin, guilt, etc. When they truly discover the light of Christ and begin to live in and through Him, they can reflect a light of forgiveness, grace and acceptance. Is this person you? Perhaps your testimony can help shine the light in someone else's life.

2) Some of us today are blinded by despair or hopelessness but can offer a light of hope and courage to others as we go through the same kind of darkness they might be going through.

3) And for all of us who have experienced the light of life in our lives and are awaiting the arrival of the light of Christ once again, this Christmas we are already equipped to offer that light to a world that is living in darkness.

Jesus is the light and He is the light of life for all people. I'm sure we can think of someone in our life right now who is experiencing darkness. How can we reflect the light of Christ to that person? Can we find a way to be a mirror of Christ's love to him or her so that they can receive God's grace?

We have a message today. That message is Jesus. We don't have to make one up! We have the Word, the scripture, our witness of Jesus Christ to share. He's the real message. We are the messengers. This world is in a mess and needs a good and hopeful message. Let's make Jesus the message to those around us by the way we live. Let's learn His Word and live His truth and light to those around us especially this Christmas season.

Let's pray.