

# The Light of the World - Christmas (2020)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The light of the world is Jesus. This is probably my favorite time of year, Christmas. We get to focus on family gatherings.

I have my two-and-a-half-year-old evangelist here this evening who's amending everything that comes out of everybody's mouth, so what a blessing that is. My son and his wonderful bride, my daughter and her two grandkids.

The other really neat thing about Christmastime is music, and thank you all for leading us in music this evening. It's really, really wonderful. Another aspect of it that was light, I just love light.

Have you noticed that a lot of things that are tied to Christmas occur at night so that we can see the light and the light separates the darkness? We have our Christmas trees, and I'm sure everybody's got one of those at home.

We have this marvelous star on Sundance right out the door out here. For those of you who are watching this online and aren't familiar with Palmer Lake, we're a little town in Colorado snuggled right up against the Rocky Mountains.

[ 1 : 1 2 ]     And right outside of our door is a star that was established in 1935. It's 500 feet wide, and it was put there in the middle of the Great Depression by the folks here to provide encouragement to people that were suffering through the Depression.

Christmas is a season of light, and we get to worship the light at Christmas. I'd like to read from Isaiah 60, verses 1 through 3.

This was written 700 years before Christ's birth. And if you're able, please stand for the reading of God's Word. Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will rise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you, and nations shall come to your light, and kings to the bride of your rising.

Pray with me, if you would, please. Lord God, we thank you for the season and the beginning of the promise that it represents, a promise fulfilled in your sacrifice at Easter.

[ 2 : 3 1 ]     Lead us to be attentive to your Spirit as we open your Word. Open our hearts and minds to your truth. Help believers to deepen their relationship with you, and draw unbelievers to yourself.

Help me to stand out of the way this evening so that your words flow unabated into the souls of those you call to yourself. In Christ's precious name we pray.

Amen. As we study the Word tonight, I want you to focus on that first part of the verse in Isaiah.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. There are two other relevant passages for this evening out of Isaiah. Isaiah 9, and they're very familiar to all of us.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them the light has shone. For unto us a child is born.

[ 3 : 33 ] Unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

We get to hear these words every year at this time. And those of you who enjoy music, this is straight out of Handel's Messiah.

And Handel's Messiah is scripture, which is just wonderful. I personally think it's the best piece of music ever written. We have this wonderful CD that we listen to every day that was put together by St. Martin of the Fields, and it's just glorious.

And we worship the God of light. But what does that mean? What does it mean to worship the God of light? So as we gather together this evening, I want us to ponder some questions.

Now Psalms has a word for this, and Bill talked about this last Sunday. Selah. You see in the Psalms, where we're reading through, and you see that little word selah, which is kind of odd.

[ 4 : 40 ] But it means pause and ponder. We have a hard time doing that in our society because we're running so fast in so many different directions. But I'd like for us to do that this evening.

Let's pause and ponder the following questions. What is this light that Isaiah is talking about? How do we respond to the light?

And what does shining God's light look like? So let's look at that. Christmas is all about lights and wonder. And I think back to my childhood.

I certainly loved Christmas trees as a child that were all bright and exciting. I know in my mom's day, and even previous to that, before a lot of people had electric lights, they put candles in Christmas trees.

That actually scares me to death to do that. But that's something that they did back in the day. My mom's family in New England had this really neat tradition, I think.

[ 5 : 43 ] They didn't set up the Christmas tree before Christmas Day. They waited until the kids went to bed. And when the kids woke up in the morning and came down, the tree and the lights and the presents and everything was there.

It was like magic. Really, really neat. Part of the growing up that I did, I did in Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. And we had this really neat aspect of kind of a community activation thing.

I can't even talk. Parade. I can say that. Where everybody in town got together in my little Cub Scout troop. You know, we were all dressed up in our uniforms and got together.

And we followed the people that were dressed in period costumes down the main drag of Williamsburg, Virginia called Duke of Gloucester Street. And we were singing carols, and they had these boxwood torches.

And we would all march down through the center of town just right at dusk. And as we marched past the houses, they lit the candles in the windows. So you could kind of see this whole thing illuminates, hence the word illuminations for that.

[ 6 : 53 ] It was really a special time. And the cool thing about it is light pierces the darkness. We have a lot of darkness around us. And Christmas should be a season about reveling in the light, but we as a society seem to be less and less concerned about the light and more and more concerned about things.

So if we think about what the society tends to do with Christmas, you know, we keep it light, we keep it happy, we don't make it challenging, and we focus on getting stuff. And that should be okay, right?

Because, you know, Mary and Joseph got gold, frankincense, and mirror when baby Jesus was born. So that's okay, right? And, you know, giving birth in a stable it's kind of like camping.

You know, we have a nice, warm place to stay. There's hay everywhere. There's animals that we can pet. You know, it's really a pleasant situation. And the end result of this whole thing is a baby is born.

Man, what could be less threatening than that? It's all good. Nothing's bad here. Except, we need to think why they were there in the first place.

[ 8 : 09 ] The reason they were in Bethlehem is because Caesar Augustus made a decree that you guys got to drop everything that you're doing, leave your home, leave your business, and go to the city of your origin.

And unless you lived in the city of your origin, that was a tough time. This is Imperial Rome closing your business, and in Mary and Joseph's case, forcing you to march with your family 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

And we think it's bad when the restaurants close here. They're not making anybody go anywhere. That's tough. The other thing we think about is we remember the story of King Herod, right?

And he heard about this new king coming, and he was very jealous. And his response to that was he stepped out in jealousy, and he was going to slaughter every baby boy he could possibly find because he didn't want any competition for the throne.

Herod lived in Jerusalem, which is only a very few miles away from Bethlehem. So baby Jesus was born right under his nose. The light of the world came in the midst of threatening darkness.

[ 9 : 28 ] And this baby that came is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He's God come to men clothed in flesh. And we sit here this evening to celebrate the birth of Christ, but we know that that birth is only the start of the story.

We think back to the words of John 1, 1 through 13. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God, and all things were made through him. And without him, there was not anything that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

But he was not the light, but he came to bear witness to the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

[ 10 : 36 ] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but the will of God.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, and he came to redeem us. He paid a price that we could not pay, and by doing so, reconciled the conflict that a holy and perfect God could have a relationship with sinful people that deserved just punishment.

But we push away that relationship and deny the desire that our creator has to fellowship with us. We deny his sovereignty and seek to set ourselves up as the authority.

John 3 is a very familiar passage, but we need to read the whole thing. If we look at verse 16, which we're familiar with, we need to carry on just a bit to the 19.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whomever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. That's what we always hear, and it's typically where we stop.

[ 11 : 58 ] But if we read on a couple of other verses, I think it's revealing. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

And this is the judgment that the light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Our actions, our sinful actions, merit judgment and eternal separation from God. So God allowed himself to be sacrificed on the cross by the people that he came to save.

He not only suffered physical death that could be seen, but also eternal separation of God that we would have endured that we can't see. But Jesus didn't die on the cross because he has risen.

[ 13 : 05 ] He's paid the price for our sins. He's called us to himself and established a new covenant and redeemed us by his sacrifice. Adam and Eve's fall was not an accident.

It was not some mistake that Jesus had to create. This was always God's plan for us that he could glorify himself and fill the gap between a perfect God and sinful men.

Jesus is truly the light of the world. He's sent to us to reveal our sin, to light our way and to save us from our sins. But there are many out there that say, wait a minute, save us from our sins.

But I don't need to be saved. I'm a pretty good person. I'm way better than that Rick guy. I'm not perfect. You know, I'll accept that.

But I'm way better than most. As my sister-in-law says, I always told her kids, denial is not just a river in Egypt. Comparisons are appropriate, but we need to make the right comparison.

[ 14 : 13 ] So let's do that. If we look at Matthew 5.48, this is the comparison. You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

Okay, I can't do that. Romans 3.23 also said, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Can do that.

Have done that. None of us meet the standard. Light reveals our true nature and we learn a lot about ourselves by how we respond to the light.

Because light exposes, light draws a clear distinction with the dark. And in the spiritual sense, it's the difference between good and bad, between right and wrong.

We were created for a relationship and in particular, a relationship with our creator. And as such, I believe that we have an innate sense of what right and wrong is.

[ 15 : 15 ] So we tend to do the things that we're not supposed to in the dark. We embrace the dark because we feel that we can do things there that others won't know about.

We can hide our actions from our parents and our friends and our spouses. And we think we can even hide from God. Luke 12.2 refutes that because it says, nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be made known.

We can't hide from God's light. And most times, we can't even hide from men. Our deeds will be discovered and exposed by the light for all to see.

Hiding from the light is the first clue that we're in the wrong place. So many of us pretend to be in the light. They live in the light showing others what we want them to see.

And they live in darkness hiding actions that we know to be wrong. Nothing is hidden that won't be revealed. So how does this affect others when our hypocrisy is laid bare by the light?

[ 16 : 30 ] You not only damage yourself, but you damage your brothers and sisters who see you and can't resolve your talk with your walk. You damage your children who want to be just like you.

And they take your sins to the next generation. This double standard does not honor God. We need to stay in the light. Some use their faith as, or I say faith, as a license to intentionally continue to sin because Jesus will forgive you.

Now we recognize that we all fall short of the glory of God and Jesus does forgive us. But those who take that position are taking it to the next level.

They're suggesting that God is a vending machine that pours out grace at our whim regardless of our motives and our commitment to Him. These people think God exists to serve them, but in reality we exist to serve God.

Paul speaks to this very issue in Romans 6. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means.

[ 17 : 49 ] How can we who died to sin still live in it? As Christians, we bear the name of Christ. What we do reflects upon Him.

We need to live our lives in the light to honor Christ. So we need to learn about God's light and move away from the dark. Learning about the light and comparing ourselves to it creates another challenge.

And that is when we're convicted we're embarrassed by the light. The light exposes our flaws, our bruises, our failures, our scars.

We want to hide from the light because we're ashamed. I made too many bad decisions. I'm too broken to fix. God's greatest gift to us is forgiveness of that.

He didn't come for perfect people but for sinners like us. Mark 2, 17 says, It's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I've not come to call the righteous but sinners.

[ 18 : 58 ] Jesus seeks out sinners just like us. He wants to redeem us, pay the price for our sins and cover us with His grace so that we can approach the Father and have relationship with Him.

This is the unmerited gift of grace. Ephesians 2, 8, 9 says, For it is by grace you have been saved through faith in this not of your own doing.

It is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast. And to quote Alistair Begg, this is a gift to be received not a diploma to be earned.

Many of us are willing to accept God's forgiveness but we can't forgive ourselves. we need to trust God and do that. We were made to live in the light.

It requires acceptance of who we are. It requires humility to be seen for what we truly are. And we can't conjure up enough courage to do this on our own.

[ 20 : 09 ] We can only do this by accepting God's most precious gift as we are with all our dirt and warts and scars. and this is what the church is intended to be.

A disparate group of people from all walks of life, from all backgrounds, bound together to glorify God. And God uses every scar and mistake for his glory.

Your scars enable you to speak from experience and reach those that would never respond to someone else who had not been through what you had been through. And you guys who are looking at this online can't see this, but we have this wonderful wall over here that I just love.

It's a field stone wall that's glued together with cement. And if I look at each one of the rocks in this wall, it's not this perfect clear glass cube.

Every rock that's in there is a different shape. Some are sharp, some are rounded, some are marred, some have been through a pretty hard time. All of them aren't clear, they're all kind of a brown color, but they just, they bear the scars of what they have been through.

[ 21 : 28 ] And I just love that because that's the same kind of situation that we have as sinners. All our bumps, all our bruises, all our scars, all our sharp edges need to fit together, but they require the cement of Christ's grace and mercy to do that.

But when that's there, it makes this wonderful column. And when it's there for us, it makes this wonderful universal church. 1 Corinthians 15, 47 through 55 says, I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

[ 22 : 51 ] O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? There's Handel's Messiah coming out again. So church, arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Now we've looked at Christ as the light of the world, and we look at how we respond to the light, let's look at how we can reflect God's light. We don't have light of our own, but we can and should pass along the light that God has given us.

We honor God through our actions, but not to merit his favor. We do it because he has favored us. We don't get to do it, it.

We do it because we received a gift of life. And because his light shines in us, we have a responsibility to reflect it to others.

2020 has been a difficult year. We have many folks that we know that are sick, many folks are out of work, society is turned upside down, everything about COVID is a relational disease.

[ 24 : 05 ] we talk about social distancing, we talk about masks, we talk about people being isolated, especially if you're in a care facility. Many people are examining their mortality for probably the first time in their lives.

They're scared and they're hopeless. The reality is that people are crafted for eternity and we can either enjoy that in relationship with God where he will be with us and we will be with him or we can endure that for all eternity separated from him.

We need to shine God's light in this Christmas season in accordance with what we read in Matthew 5, 15-16. People don't get a lamp and put it under a basket, but they put it 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's in heaven. So we need to let our light shine, but it's important how we let our light shine.

We're not doing it for us, we're not doing it for accolades and somebody patting us on the back, we're doing it for the Lord. We have to stay in the light ourselves to facilitate that, though.

[ 25 : 29 ] We need to study his word and as a result, I have homework for you. The most important person that we have to preach the gospel to is the person that we look at in the mirror.

We need to be reminded of the price that was paid to redeem us. We also need to be in his word reading his word.

So, I know the guys here are all believers you folks who are watching this online. If any of you are hearing this, and these sound like new things to you, and you want to explore this, reading the word is important, but picking what version of the word is also important.

The original Old Testament text was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. The original New Testament text was written in Greek. I don't know about you, but I don't speak any one of those three languages. I need somebody to translate that into English, preferably Southern English, so that I can understand it.

There are different versions of the Bible that are written with different perspectives. The ESV and NASB are the ones that we typically look at because they're more a literal word-for-word translation.

[ 26 : 48 ] But if you're new to this, and you want to explore this without all the F's, you know, do if, please if, whatever if, that you read in the King James, which many of us have seen before, I would encourage you to pick up the new international version.

You don't necessarily need to go down to the bookstore and buy it. You can find all of this online. But the homework assignment for the new folks and for us too is I'd like for you to read through the gospel of Mark.

And that sets the general stage for who Christ is, why he came, what he's here for. And then I would like for you to read the book of Romans because that reminds us of the gospel.

We need to encourage each other towards the light. We are a kingdom of priests, those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. And we need to be there for each other.

And to quote Jim Daly that I heard this week that I thought was great too, Christmas is not about presents, these things that we give each other. Christmas is about presence, being with each other.

[ 28 : 01 ] Look around you at the people that you come in contact with. See who needs help, see who needs encouragement, and do what you can to encourage them. Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Let's close in prayer. Lord God, I earnestly pray that you would touch all these hearing today with your spirit and draw them to a deeper relationship with you.

Convict us all of our dark hiding places and call us to live in your light. Help us to let go of our worry of personal inadequacies, doubt, and poor decisions, and accept the gift of light and life that you offer with confidence that only you can provide.

You are the only one with the words of life, and we have nowhere else to go. Lead your universal church this season to arise and share your light with the dark world that surrounds us.

To your glory and praise alone, we pray. Amen.