

The Light of Christmas

Brothers and sisters, friends and visitors its hard not to notice that the birth of Jesus Christ seems to be connected with light.

For starters you have the Old Testament prophecies foretelling the birth of the Messiah, like the first part of Isaiah 9:4 that we had up on the screen earlier. *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”*

There’s also Isaiah 42:6, where God says *“I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.”*

And Isaiah 49:6 which repeats this promise *“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”*

Also Isaiah 60:1, 3 *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.... Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”*

Then moving into the New Testament, you have the Gospel of John 1:9 *“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”*

Not to mention what we read earlier from Luke 2 when the Angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds to tell them of Jesus’ birth, Luke 2:9 says that *“the glory of the Lord shone... all around them”*

And it was a star, mentioned in Mathew 2, shining brightly in the darkness of the night sky, which drew the attention of the wise men and guided them westward in their search for the King of the Jews, the baby Jesus.

So if the birth of Jesus is characterized as light coming into the world, then we should not be surprised that later on – when Jesus grew up and began His ministry He stated *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (John 8:12) And again in John 12:46, Jesus repeats this, saying *“I have come into the world as*

a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”

So, with all these references and connections between Jesus, His birth and light, it is no surprise that Christians have used light – such as candles, and then eventually Christmas lights, as part of celebrating His birth.

There is a connection between the birth of Christ and light. But what does this connection symbolize? What did it mean for the prophets to foretell of the light coming into this world? What did it mean for Jesus to claim He was the light of this world?

Well brothers and sisters, friends and visitors, allow me to shed a bit of light on these questions tonight.

First, what does the connection between Jesus Christ and light symbolize?

Well in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Psalms, we find that God Almighty – the living God, the one true God, the God known as Yahweh... is often described with references to light. Psalm 89:15 and Psalm 90:8 both speak of *“the light of God’s presence”* and Psalm 104:2 says *“Yahweh wraps himself in light, like a garment...”*

So the connection of Jesus Christ to light symbolizes the divine connection which He has to God Almighty, Yahweh.

Furthermore, in the Psalms there are many references to light and to God’s Law. The most famous reference is Psalm 119:105 which says *“your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path”* but there is also Psalm 19:8 which says *“The commands of Yahweh are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”*

So, light also symbolizes how God’s Law functions in showing us what it means to live our lives righteously and helping us to see and understand how we can give honor and glory and be obedient to God, and how that is a good and desirable thing.

Thus, Jesus' connection to light also symbolizes His connection with God's law.

So when the Prophets foretold the birth of Jesus, describing it as an event where people walking in darkness see a great light, they were speaking of a time when God Himself, Yahweh would come into this world to fully reveal Himself and His Law to us. In order that humanity would no longer be in the darkness of ignorance about who God is, what He expects from us, and how we should respond to Him.

You see, unless God shows Himself to us, unless God reveals His law to us – our best guess about who God is and what He requires from us are just that, a good guess. And if you are familiar with the ancient religions and indigenous spiritualities of the world and their mythology and practices and beliefs... then you can see how we human beings have put forward our best guesses.

Now I don't have time tonight to describe how ancient religions and spiritualities took their best guesses, you don't

want me to make this a 30 min sermon... so please give me the benefit of the doubt when I say some of their guesses about God were close... but as they say close only counts in the game of horseshoes and hand grenades. The people of the ancient world were still ignorant and walking in darkness in spite of their best guesses.

Thus, whenever the prophets speak about the birth of Jesus in connection with the light, they make reference to people walking in darkness. The darkness of ignorance regarding who God is and what He expects from us and how we need to respond to Him.

The good news is that God is promising to do something about this ignorance, this darkness, and so the prophets proclaimed that the light was going to come into the darkness... and tonight we celebrate the fulfillment of that promise by acknowledging and confessing this occurred when Jesus Christ was born.

Do you believe Jesus Christ is the light that comes into the darkness? Then you believe that Jesus is divine, He is not only from God, He is of God, He is God – the Light...

Do you realize that you need the light of Jesus Christ to help you see in the darkness? Then you believe that God's Law, spoken by God's Word, has become embodied, incarnate through the birth of Jesus Christ... the Light...

This is what Jesus Christ wanted us to understand and believe when He said of himself *“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

Now its tempting for us to believe that the people in the ancient world were ignorant, living in darkness because they didn't have the benefit of all the scientific discoveries and technological advancements that we have today – which have enabled us to move beyond superstition and myth and become more... enlightened.

But as I said, the issue was about not knowing God, what He expects from us and how we ought to respond to Him. Jesus brought the true knowledge of God, the perfect embodiment of God's Law, and the Holy Spirit guided response to God to the ancient world.

And as the light of the world, He not only revealed knowledge and truth as an example, He was in fact our substitute. He obeyed God's Law, and lived a righteous life on our behalf so that He could give that righteousness to us, and so that He could offer Himself as a sacrifice for our failure to obey God and live righteously... but you're going to have to come back at Easter to hear all about that ok.

But as a result of Jesus' life as the light of the world, Isaiah 49:6 was fulfilled. Jesus became a light for the Gentiles, and God's salvation has reached the ends of the earth. Millions of people have followed Jesus and received His light of life and have no longer walked in the darkness about who God is and how to live righteously in obedience to Him.

But, nowadays it has become tempting for us to believe that the last two to three hundred years was also a time of ignorance and darkness because of how that era was predominantly shaped by Western Judeo-Christian values, biblical principles, traditional marriage and gender roles and a belief that there was universal objective truth of God that applied to all humans, everywhere, at all times.

So, it is now considered virtuous and forward thinking to vilify the Judeo-Christian biblical beliefs and values and practices of that time as oppressive and restrictive, and to repudiate and reject them, because upon doing so one leaves behind an oppressive past and embraces our true identity and supposedly becomes more... enlightened.

This is the reasoning behind the recent statement from the Human Rights Commission that celebrating the birth of Christ is something that is discriminatory and racist. It is an attempt to show how that they are truly progressive and... enlightened.

But let's shine some light on this shall we? God's Law, God's Word – the scriptures shine the light of Christ into our daily lives and so the light from 2 Corinthians 4:4 shows us what is really going on these days.

The Apostle Paul writes *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."*

And here's some more light on the situation. Paul reveals in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that *"Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."*

So, I hope that helps the lightbulb come on for us brothers and sisters, friends and visitors, so that we understand and see how the push to reject our Judeo-Christian heritage is being framed as something that's good, attractive, progressive, enlightened... when it's actually evil.

I know it sounds good, but it should make our warning lights come on – so that we do not fall for the devil’s deception. So, here’s one of those warning lights from the scripture, Isaiah again, 5:20 *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.”* The redefinition of what used to be good as evil and oppressive, and what was once considering oppressive and evil is now good – and courageous and brave. This is the defining mark of the so-called progressives, do not be deceived by it.

So, the celebration of the birth of Christ is not racist or discriminatory, it is not darkness – it is light. It was foretold as such, it happened as such, it is still is... and always will be connected to the Light. So, here’s a light of hope from the scriptures....

John 1:5 says *“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it!”*

In fact brothers and sisters, friends and visitors – as the darkness becomes increasingly dark around us, and people

fumble and stumble around in it - it makes the light of Christ stand out that much more.

So here you are tonight, drawn to the light of Christ, it is attractive, warm, and wonderful. It shines, it sparkles, it is inviting... the candles and the lights we put up for decorations testify to that. You can’t see the Christmas decorations out in the malls, the shops, and in the neighborhoods and not be drawn into the spirit of the season and be attracted to the light.

And then there’s the manner in which the light of Christmas comes into our world, in a gentle and approachable way. It’s not a harsh overwhelming light that blinds us as we have to adjust from being in the darkness. In contrast to Pride, the Word of God comes as a baby, in humility and vulnerability, born in low station.

And just like sunlight disinfects and cleanses and contributes to healing and our health, in contrast to the celebration of what is broken and perverted, as the Light of the world Jesus

brings us healing, cleansing from evil spirits, forgiveness of sins, correction and restoration.

And just as light helps us see where we are going, and avoid going in the wrong direction, keeps us from hitting something and injuring ourselves or others, and prevents us from driving into the ditch, in contrast to following our own truth and listening to our hearts, the Light of Jesus Christ and the scriptures shows us right from wrong, and leads us into blessings.

But most importantly, the Light of Christ shines into our hearts and allows us to see who we really are. In contrast to our self-absorbed introspective concern to find our authentic selves the light of Christ shines on us and in us... and in doing so it reveals our true identity. As Ephesians 5:13 says *“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.”*

So now we are lights, the Light of Christ gives us our true identity. As Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 5:5 *“You are*

all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.” The light lets us know who and whose we are.

So, how can the darkness overpower the light? It can't and it won't. the Light of Christ and Christmas is attractive and inviting, it is gentle and humble, it brings restoration and wholeness, it gives guidance and direction and it shows us who we are.

May the light of Christ of Christmas shine brightly on you all and in you – tonight and for the year to come.

Amen.