

JJ¹

Without looking at the calendar, you can know that Christmas is coming. One day you walk into Fleet Farm®, and Toy-land® is there. Special candies, cookies and egg nog show up on the store shelves. Sometimes the snow lets you know. But one of the most welcome signs that Christmas is coming is Christmas lights. Whether it's white lights or colored lights, icicle or straight, inside or out, just a few or so many that you'd weep if you saw their electric bill, Christmas lights are a welcome sign that Christmas is coming. In our family growing up, we'd often take a little time after midweek Advent services to drive through neighborhoods around us to see all the lights.

I know it's daytime, but we're going to spend our time this Christmas morning talking about Christmas lights, or really just one Christmas light. Although the Christmas lights we see all around can be very beautiful and some even very bright, they don't even begin to compare the **THE CHRISTMAS LIGHT**. As we will see this morning, this Christmas light we talk about today is far more beautiful and far brighter than all the Christmas lights in the world. Today we focus on the Light who came into this world of

darkness so that he could shine his light of love into our hearts.

Now even though the sun shines every day, this time of year it doesn't shine very much. Think of the many people, perhaps yourself included, and how they react to such short days and long nights. Granted, we just moved past the solstice, but you can't tell yet. As the darkness lingers, it weighs heavy on people. It can fill them with horrible feelings of loneliness and helplessness. Some people even fall into seasonal depression! This response we can often have to physical darkness can also show us a spiritual truth. That spiritual truth is the fact that by nature, our hearts are bound to spiritual darkness.

A time of significant spiritual darkness was when our Savior came into this world. Many in Israel were lost to the darkness of idolatry like the rest of the world. While some had turned to worshipping false gods made of wood, stone or metal, many, instead, worshiped the false god of self. Many in Israel had been deceived by those who were supposed to be their spiritual shepherds and were led down the dark path of unbelief by looking to their own good works to get right with God. With this they no longer needed the promised Savior prophesied in the Scriptures, or so they thought. And

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

so, lost in this darkness, they were expecting only an earthly king. In fact, John tells us that even when he did come “to what was his own...his own people did not receive him!”

I know it’s shocking to think. How in the world could the Israelites, God’s chosen people, people who received even tiny details about the Savior, not recognize him or receive him? It’s because of spiritual darkness.

The darkness of our sin is the blackest midnight consuming our souls. As we heard Isaiah say in our first lesson, we walk “in darkness” and live “in the land of the shadow of death” (Is. 9:2). This spiritual darkness makes us unable to see God for who he is and to see ourselves for who we truly are. We get just as mixed up as the Israelites so long ago and think we can fix our own problems. But this only leads to deeper darkness. On the other hand, we, in our darkness, may think that we’re even beyond the help of God and turn away from him in shame.

To escape this darkness would take a miracle! But it wasn’t going to work through a fantastic miracle of God flashing his glory in the heavens, or even on the earth like he did at Mt. Sinai. Do you recall what happens when God does it this way? When God made his presence known on Mt. Sinai the Israelites trem-

bled with fear. When the LORD appeared to Isaiah in the temple, Isaiah thought he was a dead man. Last night we heard how when the angels appeared to the shepherds “the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified!” (Lk. 2:9) In fact, the LORD told Moses that if he saw the full display of his glory he would die! (Ex. 33:20)

So God had to give his Light, and our **CHRISTMAS LIGHT**, to us in a different way. He had to bring that Light into the world so that we could hold him and be-

hold him. And that is exactly what he did, just as John tells us. “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

God had to come into his creation in order to bring his love to us. That’s how dark our hearts are by nature. So dark and absolutely vacant of anything good that God had to become one of us! And so he did just that. He became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones!

Friends, God has come and taken on our human flesh, which he created! He didn’t come as one of the animals he created. He didn’t become an angel in order to save the devil and the angels who rebelled against him long ago. If he has come into this world and become just like you and me, then that means his coming is meant



for our benefit! We see this in that he comes to us, because we cannot come to him. He has come to us and lived among us so that he could die as one of us. And since he is also God in every way, his death means that all of the darkness of our sins has been destroyed by the light of his holy sacrifice!

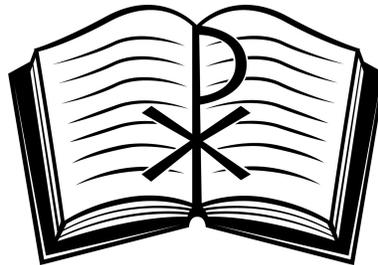
The darkness of sin had separated us from God farther than the heavens are from the earth. But now, since our true **CHRISTMAS LIGHT** has come into the world that separation is removed! And John tells us how God removes that separation and darkness from us personally. He says that “to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.”

We were not made a child of God in the way children are born. We also aren’t made children of God just because of the blood we have running through our veins. If we needed to have Abraham’s blood running through our veins, we’d be wasting our time here this morning.

We are not made children of God by our own choosing or decision. We are made children of God by being born of God. Scripture tells us that this happens “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5b,6).

Through this washing, through baptism, God gives us the gift of faith and Christ himself tells us that “we are members of his body” (Eph. 5:30). Through faith, the darkness of sin is removed so that we may see this little baby for who he truly

is—our most glorious **CHRISTMAS LIGHT**! This little child lying in a manger is our God and Savior, the one who is “the real light that shines on everyone.”



People of God. Rejoice that our God has taken on our flesh so that we could belong to him forever! Rejoice that this **CHRISTMAS LIGHT** will never go out and will light our way to him in heaven where we will see him in all his glorious light! Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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