

Sermon for December 6, 2015 – Advent 2

John 1:9-10,12-13 (NIV84)

Theme: **Celebrate a Better Christmas. . . with Better Christmas Lights**

(1) Jesus shining (2) through us.

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

Decorating houses with lights has become a beloved Christmas custom. Who doesn't enjoy seeing these beautiful displays? My children get so excited to see Christmas lights that they seem to point out every single house decorated with them.

As you know, Christmas displays come in all shapes and sizes – from simple to having so many lights that you need sun glasses to look at them. But what impresses me most about a Christmas display is not its beauty and brilliance (and trust me, through my travels I have seen some truly impressive displays) but the message it conveys.

I vividly remember one in particular – although I can't say where I saw it. I just remember driving with my parents at night down a dark highway and a lighted, lone house appearing in the middle of a dark field. The lights were simple: there were no colors, Santas, or flashing lights moving to a musical beat. There was just one, large, white Star of David and the message "Peace On Earth" written so visibly and clearly that no one could ever miss it traveling through the darkness.

Today we are also going to talk about a Christmas Light that no one could miss; a light that, even though it looks simple, its beauty is beyond comparison because of the wonderful message it conveys. Let us learn to **celebrate a better Christmas with a better Christmas Light**, namely with the light of Jesus shining through us.

Part One: Jesus shining

Right before our sermon text, the apostle John begins his Gospel by describing Jesus as the “Word,” who not only existed from eternity with God, but is, in fact, God himself. Jesus is also called the Light shining in the darkness – to whom John the Baptist testified.

And this is where our text begins: *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. . . .*

Why does Scripture call Jesus “Light”? It’s because mankind is living in the dark. Let me explain what I mean with an illustration: If you went down to the middle of the old boiler room of this Church, and had someone turn off the lights and close the door, you would not be able to see at all. You might get disoriented and hurt yourself by running into things. In a place like the old boiler room – with all the pipes and objects sticking this way and that, you need light to navigate through the dangerous darkness to safely find your way out.

Our world is trapped in spiritual darkness – not realizing the deadly danger it is in. The world neither sees its corruption, recognizes its God, nor acknowledges its need for a Savior. Even though it is continually searching for true meaning, peace and love, the world can never find it. Why not? Because it is living in such spiritual darkness that it not only is ignorant of the truth, it also refuses to heed God’s call to come into the light.

But why don’t people want to come into the light of God’s Word? Because they are afraid of what they might see. Let me explain what I mean.

I think it would be fun looking into a mirror in absolute darkness. Why? Because I can imagine myself to be whomever I want. I could imagine myself with a head full of long flowing hair and a tanned, athletic body. I could convince myself that this is who I really am because I can’t really see myself in the dark. But turn on the light, and then the truth about me is seen – and it is not anything like I imagine!

This is how it is with the world. Humanity thinks it knows itself - always congratulating itself for how it thinks it’s progressing. Many people imagine themselves as basically good and deserving of God’s every blessing.

But when God shines the light of his holy law upon us, we see ourselves for what we truly are - and it isn’t close to anything we imagine. God’s law reveals us as totally corrupt and sinful. We do not deserve God’s love in the least. We are helplessly lost and, if left to fend for ourselves, doomed to eternal death in hell. The world does not like hearing this truth. This is why it doesn’t want to come into the light of God’s Word.

But what the world fails to realize is that God's light doesn't only show us our sins, it also shows us our salvation. God's light reveals who He is, His love and all that He has done to save us.

And this is where Jesus comes in. He is God's light: the true revelation of both God's justice and mercy. To see, hear and know him is to see, know and hear the true God. He has come to reveal the way of salvation so that we can be safe and live forever with him in heaven.

And what is the way of salvation? Simply this: to repent of all sin and look to Jesus in faith for forgiveness - trusting that He has fully paid for every one of our sins through his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection.

Jesus is the true Christmas light, and oh, how beautiful he is! He did not come in great pomp as a gaudy Christmas display, but as a lowly babe - born into a poor, simple family. And yet, like that lone farm house in a dark field (which I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon) He shines forth a most important message: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28, NIV84).* Yes, come to Christ. Lay all your burdens, fears and - most importantly - sins at his feet, and He will heal you. It is true that, coming into the light means you will have to acknowledge things about yourself that you will not want to acknowledge. Admitting our utter sinfulness is always difficult. But there is genuine healing in His light - true forgiveness, life and salvation.

Coming into the light of Christ through repentance and faith will move us to sing with aged Simeon: *Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32, NIV84)*

Yes, Jesus is the great Christmas light of all Christmas lights who has come to give us peace with God and guide us home to heaven. Blessed are all who believe this; because, as the last part of our sermon text states:

Part Two: Through us.

to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Light is very important to humans. We need light. Not only does it give us direction and sight, but also nourishment and life. Our bodies produce vitamins on the basis of the sunlight we are exposed to. It physically changes us.

If physical light has such an effect on us, how much more the light of Christ! When we receive him we are changed. His Word gives us spiritual life and strengthens us in it, as Jesus said: *"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)

Through the miracle of faith, the light of Jesus makes us his children, as he himself once said: *Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."* (John 12:36)

And as children of the light who bask in all the wonderful ways God has blessed and saved us, we become illuminated ourselves. Like the moon staring at the sun and reflecting its light towards this dark earth, so we too, as we stare at the Son of God, reflect his light to the dark world around us, drawing attention to him and his salvation.

We are God's great Christmas lights in the world, shining brilliantly as we share the Gospel of Jesus with our family and friends. Even though we might feel a little scared to confess Christ to others, the light of his "good news of great joy" overwhelms us to such a degree that we can't help but reflect the brilliance of His love to those around us. Jesus encourages us with these words: ¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:14-16)

Christmas lights are certainly beautiful to behold. But the most beautiful Christmas lights of all are you as you shine forth the light of Christ. When I see you, brothers and sisters in Christ, I see Jesus because of the faith He put in your hearts.

So celebrate Christmas with better Christmas lights: not the lights that go on the house, but with the light of Christ that shines in the Gospel and is reflected into the world through you. Celebrate a better Christmas by rejoicing with other Christians throughout this Christmas season - encouraging one another with the light of Christ and shining it in our community by inviting others to come and hear the good news. Amen.