

Merry Christmas! This morning we're going to talk about the ultimate Christmas gift, God's son, Jesus—who is the light of the world—and about what this means for our walk with the Lord and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

JOHN 1:1-5, 10-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

One of the greatest threats to modern civilization is the loss of electricity. Think of it: Without electricity, TVs, radios, and computers would go dark; the flow of water and gas would stop; our heating and air conditioning wouldn't work; oil wells and gas pumps would die; we would resort to campfires to cook our meals; our transportation system would be rolled back a hundred years to horse drawn carriages; and there would be no light.

Spiritually, that's what life would look like if we did not have Jesus. We would only know the God of justice and judgment. We would not have any reason to be

confident that our prayers were heard by the Lord. There would be no joy in our songs. We would only hope for salvation—there would be no assurance—for we would not have the Holy Spirit.

That's how St. John wanted us to think when he wrote about Jesus, that **"The light shines in the darkness."**

Later on, St. Paul also used the picture of **"light"** to describe the Lord's work. He wrote to the church in Corinth, that **"God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2nd Corinthians 4:6).**

Before I served Jesus as my Lord as a layman and then as a pastor, I had no vision for the future. The joy I found in my work was only momentary. Nothing held any great significance. I did not value life as anything more than a random event. But when I began to listen to his voice—his Word—everything changed. For example, relationships became more important. I realized that what one says and does can make a difference in another person's life for eternity. I was no longer just a random creature on a random rock shooting through a random galaxy. I was a child of God with a purpose.

That's what St. John meant when he said, **"The light shines in the darkness."**

Nonetheless, the darkness remains all around us, doesn't it? It's insidious; it's like a cancer. It creeps up on us and we sometimes mistake it for ambition, personal choice, and initiative.

I had a friend whose dad had an irritating way of not so subtly pointing out flaws in one's character. One time he said to me that I didn't know as much about myself as I thought I did, and that I would probably never change. I told him he was wrong, that I understood myself pretty well, that I was on top of my game. After all, I was 18 years old! He said to me, "Richard, there are things about ourselves we can never change on our own. And that's for one simple reason: We can't see them, and the reason we can't see them is because we use them to see."

That's what makes this Good News so good. We read, **"In (Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (vv.4-5)**. The definition of darkness is the absence of light. Jesus is our light. But darkness envelopes the world, for it lives without Jesus.

Michael Jordan was arguably the best basketball player of all time. Some even say he changed how the game is played. But Michael never talked about himself like that. Rather, he just played ball and the world learned. Now everything on the court is measured against Michael's game, yes, even LeBron James' game! Players still say to each other, "Be like Mike!" Michael Jordan shined light on the game of basketball and changed it forever.

That's how Jesus brought light into the world: He lived his life among us. And now everything in life is measured against Jesus' game, his light. Indeed, people everywhere, including unbelievers and people from other faith-traditions, use Jesus as a barometer for how to live. For example, Jesus said **"Blessed are the merciful,"** thus mercy is a universal virtue. I can't count the number of times I've heard some part of the Beatitudes or the Golden Rule quoted in the media without any reference to the Bible or Christ.

The Scripture reads, **"(Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (vv.10-11)**.

The **"world did not know (Jesus)"** because of its hypocrisy. People like the Jesus who is the **"good shepherd"**; it likes the Jesus who forgives the adulteress; it likes the Jesus who cares for children and gives sight to the blind. But when the Lord reaches into the darkness of our hearts with the light of his own life, we cry out, "We like what you say and do, Jesus, but don't expect us to live like YOU!"

In truth, we want to examine our lives against the backdrop of our culture, according to what everyone else is doing. When I do that, it would appear that I'm a pretty good guy. Thank you very much. But when I do do that, I am, in effect, comparing myself to the devil, which is a very low bar, indeed.

We read that, **“to all who did receive (Jesus), 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 of God” (vv.12-13).**

Christ’s life shines light on my hypocrisy. In him we see things as they truly are. No more hiding. No more lies. And in this light, we feel sorrow for our plight, and we ask for and we receive the Lord’s forgiveness. And so, the light which once nearly blinded us as we hid in our hovel amid the wreckage of our lives brings forth life!

So the prophet Isaiah wrote, **“those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Isaiah 9:2).**

Later in John’s Gospel, we hear Jesus say of himself, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).**

If you were afraid of the dark as a child, perhaps you found comfort when you crawled down under your covers or got into bed with mom and dad. So too Jesus has enveloped you under the covers of his peace and love: He holds us close; he protects us, comforts us. He has dissolved the shadows in his light, removed all fear, and given us courage to live day-by-day in his presence. That’s the power of Christ’s light in our lives, brothers and sisters.

We read, **“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (v.14).**

Jesus is God’s grace in the flesh. There’s nothing to be earned but everything to be received, with thankfulness; when we say thank you to God for his favor, we make it our own.

This is God’s light, light pouring forth from a manger in the little town of Bethlehem, from a choir of angels to shepherds in a field, from a star which led magi from Persia to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So the wreckage of my life is revealed by the light of the life of Christ. But in this same light there is healing.

St. Paul explained what living in this light looks like when he wrote to the church in Rome: **“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:12-14).**

Earlier, I talked about how the world, even the unbelieving world, admires Christ’s life and teaching. He has shone in the darkness and **“the darkness has not overcome it,”** despite itself. So too we shine as lights in the world.

For example, India is a country which is over 80% Hindu, 14% Muslim, and less than 3% Christian. Yet it was Christian missionaries who built the first orphanages, schools, and hospitals for the poor. This began 300 years before anyone else started paying attention to them. The missionaries were truly little lights of Christ.

Christians can and do change how the game is played in this crazy world. This is our call, our ministry, our mission, to be lights amidst the darkness, lights reflecting the light of our Lord Jesus, lights of God’s grace wherever we live.

Friends in Christ, let us follow after Jesus, for his light is all we have to lead us forth from this darkness.

Today, let us celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, for he would grow up and become our savior on a cross and before an empty tomb. Because of him we will live in the light of our Father in Heaven for eternity.

And this week let us take opportunity to share this light, this Good News, with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Merry Christmas!