

Jesus -- The Light That Shines in the Darkness

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[0 : 0 0] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All the things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was him.

In him was life, and the life was the light of the 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, and all might not believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about 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. 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 flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

[1 : 0 9] And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son, from the Father, full of grace and truth. 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.

For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side.

He has made him known. Well, that's good to hear from Stephen and Phyllis about their own testimony of the Lord. We're going to focus just for a few minutes on the words that Naomi read for us earlier in the service, from the start of John's Gospel.

And I'm going to read those again, and then just a brief address for the grown-ups. But if the children can listen carefully, and if they can come and tell me at the end why I've talked about creepy crawlies, come and talk to me.

So that's the thing to listen out for if you're a youngster. And also the grown-ups, if you want to come and fill me in. But let me read again these words from the beginning of John's Gospel. He says, Now Christmas is, so we're told, by the adverts on TV, by the films we watch, a time of fun, festivities, joy and light.

[3 : 1 0] And it is all those things. As we'll see, it is a time of joy and light and life. But it's only those things because Christmas, the very heart of Christmas, namely the birth of Jesus Christ, who we've been singing about, his coming is dealing with the very central problem humanity faces.

Just as we saw there Stephen and Phyllis talking about. He has come to deal with the very essence of humanity's problems. Christmas is only a cause for rejoicing because the coming of Jesus into our world deals with the reality of the human condition.

Christmas deals with reality. Because Christ coming into the world is light entering our dark world. We saw with the kids talk and the torch.

Jesus brings light into our dark world. Now this talk of darkness, it can seem an old place, can't it? At this festive time of year.

We want to escape into the lights and the lights and the presents, the Christmas trees, the gifts. We want to paper over family tensions and sadnesses.

[4 : 2 7] But if we're honest, we know they're lurking. And they're likely to re-emerge before Christmas pudding is brought out. The family tensions begin to rupture. But for many of us, Christmas isn't an escape from sadness.

But actually, it's a reminder of it. As we wish that places at our Christmas table could be filled by those who are no longer there.

You see, the reality of life in this world can't just be pretended away. January will come, along with the credit card bills and the slightly expanded waistline.

And the passage we read earlier, the passage we read again, it gets to the very heart of what's really going on with the coming of Jesus Christ into our world.

Why is there such a big deal about Christmas? Why do we celebrate it 2,000 years on? Well, it's because of the significance of what his birth meant.

[5 : 27] His coming into the world speaks of light and life. But I wonder if we found verse 5, the last verse I read, a bit jarring when it was read earlier.

It says the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. It's a bit unsettling, isn't it? Suddenly, the writer, John, inserts this idea of darkness.

Up until then, it's been about light and life. Why talk about darkness? In many ways, we distrust the dark, don't we? We don't like it.

It brings uncertainty and danger. There are dark places we dare not go. Certainly in Glasgow, there are bits we want to avoid. And if you were to look at our world from space, you would think that we're doing all we can to eliminate darkness.

Every year, we expand the square mileage of the earth covered in light by 2%. Every year, we're expanding the parts of the world that are covered in light. But according to the Bible, darkness is actually what we enjoy.

[6 : 39] You see, in Bible terms, darkness is an absence of life. It's an absence of Jesus. It's the absence of everything that is good.

And we weren't designed to live in darkness. We were designed, we were made for a relationship with God, as we heard from Lynn earlier. We were designed for that relationship.

But it's a relationship that we have turned our backs on. And so, to darkness, we turn. And whilst we weren't made for darkness, the thing is, the longer you spend in the darkness, the more your eyes become accustomed to the gloom.

And so, humanity, the Bible tells us, has become to enjoy the darkness. We've read from John's gospel.

And in chapter 3, John says these very penetrating words. He says, And the light of the light, the light of the world, to see it and to understand.

[8 : 14] Our world has not understood the light. And actually, it's rejected it. And the reason for that, we've just read, is because Jesus, as the light of the world, will expose our hearts.

Like a torch in the dark, it exposes what's there. And Jesus exposes us for who we really are. And who wants to be exposed?

Who in this room would want the deep thoughts of our hearts to be exposed for everyone to see?

We don't want people to see. We don't want to be exposed. Here comes the creepy crawly bit.

My boys love to root around in the garden, under rocks. If we're out on a walk, they'll disappear into the undergrowth and be rummaging around under logs and seeing what they can find.

And I'm sure you've seen it. You've lifted a rock. And what happens? Within about half a second, all the millipedes and the creepy crawlies have disappeared. They flee away, and they find another dark corner to go and hide in.

[9 : 18] They love the dark, and they flee the light. And that is what we are like, says John. He says we are like that.

We do not like the light. We love darkness. The light that is Jesus Christ has come into our world.

And the thing is, people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

We don't like the thoughts of our hearts being exposed. The things we keep to ourselves, things we know perhaps aren't quite right, but we've suppressed our conscience, and we do it anyway.

It no longer provokes any sense of guilt. And if we're honest, we don't want to give those things up.

We like doing things our way. And as the searching, penetrating beam of God's light brings to shine upon us, we, by nature, recoil.

We hide away. It's only by His grace at work in us that we begin to turn towards the light and not run away from it. See, John is very realistic here, isn't he?

[10 : 28] The world is a dark place. But more than that, deep down, part of us quite likes it. And that is the sober reality that Christmas faces us with.

It's the reality that John, here, faces us with. And if we're honest, we know it's true. Our world feels very dark at the moment, doesn't it? Political instability.

How many prime ministers have we had this year? Wars, inflation, tightening family budgets, strikes every day before Christmas.

All is not well in our world. And the Bible's message at Christmas is not to bury our heads in the sand or to pretend the darkness of the world away. Rather, it deals with it head on.

It is the theme of all good carols which begin with gloom. I don't know if you noticed that, but many carols begin with the gloom, but they end with the bright light and joy of Jesus Christ.

[11 : 32] It is real joy. That is why Christmas is a time of joy and festivity. It's because Jesus comes to our dark world and brings real light, real hope.

With the coming of this baby, Jesus Christ, into our world, we have God's answer to humanity's darkness. And there are two responses each of us can make to this reality, to the coming of Jesus into our world.

You can walk into the light and so know the source of life, Jesus Christ, or you can stay hidden in the shadows and live in darkness now and for all eternity.

And John's appeal to each one of us is to turn to the light, to turn to Jesus and so know life. Don't turn away. Don't turn away from the light because the Bible tells us the light is ultimately victorious.

It doesn't matter how much opposition there is to the light, the darkness will not overcome it. That's the resounding note at the end of verse 5 which I read earlier. The light defeats darkness.

[12 : 49] And that is ultimately true of the destiny of our world. The light will fully and finally shine in every corner. And the darkness will be no more.

You see, darkness doesn't stand a chance in the face of light. Come into this room in the middle of the night. You can't see a thing. But you flick on the lights and every corner of this room is flooded in light.

The darkness does not stand a chance. And so it is with the true darkness in our world. It doesn't stand a chance. because Jesus, the Son of God, has entered our world bringing true light for everyone.

The light Jesus Christ has shone and the darkness has been obliterated. That is why Christmas is a time of real joy. See, these are big claims that John is making here at the start of his Gospel.

And these claims have implications for each and every one of us in this building, in our city, and in the world. And John would urge you this Christmas to face the reality of darkness in our world, to face the reality of darkness in each one of our own hearts.

[14 : 08] but he would also urge us to respond to Jesus who is the light, to turn to him, to trust him, and to sow no life and true joy.

And in doing so, by turning to Jesus, we can know the true joy and light and life of this Christmas season. The abundance, the goodness of Christmas is because of what Jesus has done.

and that is a reason to rejoice because Jesus, the true light, as we heard with the children, and as John in his Gospel reminds us, the light shines and for all who would come to him, there is life and light, forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Well, let me pray and then we'll sing our final carol. Father, we do thank you for the real joy of this Christmas time, but we thank you that it's joy in the face of the realities of darkness, not pretending them away, but joy because Jesus comes as the answer to the real darkness in our world and in our own hearts.

So give each one of us real reason to rejoice this Christmas because of the Lord Jesus Christ and all that he has done for us. So help us to do that Lord, help us to trust in him, to turn to him.

[15 : 40] We ask in Jesus name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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