

The Life in the Light

St. Mark Lutheran
Christmas Day

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-5; 14

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
May you be blessed on this Christmas Day!

The whole Christian church on earth is celebrating the birth of Jesus, born in a stable, in the little town of Bethlehem of Judea, the city of David. Even though his birth took place over two thousand years ago, after all these centuries people continue to celebrate and rejoice, because Jesus is the light shining in the darkness of this world. He is the "light" that brings "life", and the "life" in this "light" is eternal.

It is important to recognize that the terms "light" and "life" are used many times in the Holy Scriptures and often refer to Jesus. Jesus himself said, "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) On another occasion he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) He also said, "My words are spirit, and they are life." Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and stated in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." All of this reinforces a key part of our Gospel Reading this Christmas Day, which says in part, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Christians before this have understood the importance of these words and have used symbols to remind themselves about them. Christmas lights have been used since the eighteenth century when Christians in Germany would use candles to decorate their trees with the lights to remind them of Jesus. That was, of course, dangerous. But by the late nineteenth century, incandescent light bulbs were beginning to be strung on Christmas trees to replace dangerous candles.

One Christmas light in particular has an interesting history. It was bought by Edward and Lydelle Decker just two days after they were married in 1946. Out of a package of four, one bulb has continued to light up for over seventy years. It has been placed on Christmas trees in all of these years, as well as on indoor and outdoor decorations. It has been an ever-present light in the Decker's lives for all these years. Isn't that amazing!

It may surprise you to know that Christians are not the first believers to use lights to celebrate the Lord. In Leviticus 23, the Lord gave instructions to Moses for the Israelites to celebrate his appointed feasts at specific times. God gave all sorts of details on how this was to be done. At the end of the first day of the Feast of Booths, there would be a ceremony called the Illumination of the Temple. This involved the priest going into an area where there were four golden oil-fed candelabras, or menorahs, standing seventy-five feet tall. After the ritual lighting, the lamps would remind the people of the pillar of fire the Lord used to guide them through the wilderness. All night the light would shine, illuminating the entire city. Many believe that this ceremonial light was a symbol that God would send a light, *the light*, to a sin-darkened world.

There is another term in the Bible that refers to Jesus and it is used in our Gospel reading for this day. It is "Word". John 1 tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Then the text indicates that the "Word" is also a person when it says in the next verse that "He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." That's where we get our sermon title of "The Life Is in the Light" this morning. One of the most important verses in all of the Holy Scriptures follows in verse 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." Now this is important. It is important because there are religious groups both in the past and today who try to say Jesus is special, but he is not God. There are three different groups which teach that located right down the road north of us on Chillicothe Road. Don't listen to them; listen to what the Holy Scriptures clearly say.

Today we celebrate that God kept his promise. He sent a Savior, Jesus, who is "the light of the world." But there continues to be a problem. John 1:10-11 sums it all up for us. "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 did not receive him." Why? John 3:19 answers that question. "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

We are all affected with the darkness we call sin. Each of us can find excuses for our sinful thoughts, words, and actions. Too often we want to be creators of our own lives, rather than admit our faults and confess them to God. It started with Adam and Eve disobeying God, and it continued with many of God's own people sinning and abandoning God after they entered the Promised Land. It is also increasingly apparent today in America, probably the richest and most blessed country in the history of the world. Yet we are straying further away from the Ten Commandments that God gave to guide mankind.

The good news is that God did not abandon Adam and Eve. The good news is that even in the middle of Israel's darkness God punished them, but he did not abandon them. And he will not abandon you and me if we repent of our sins and trust in Jesus. A great light has appeared to all people walking in darkness. God has acted and finally sent his Messiah into the world.

That's what we celebrate today. The Word became flesh in the form of a tiny baby. It was nothing less than the incarnation of God himself. He grew up and gave a strong indication of who he was with his many miracles. He lived a life that was impossible for us, a life without sin. When he died on the cross, it was in our place, in payment for our sins. His sacrifice was acceptable to God the Father because it was a holy, perfect sacrifice that satisfied the demands of a holy, perfect God. John 1:12 reminds us this morning, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." That's who we are!

The light that is still burning for Edward and Lydelle Baker will someday go out. But the light of the world, Jesus Christ, will never go out. The light of the Gospel can never be extinguished because Jesus Christ is the light that is, and was, and is to come. Let us celebrate this great gift. It's Christmas! Amen.

Now, I want to take you down the road a little more. There is good reason to believe "Word" and "Light" are related, as I have said, in other parts of Holy Scripture. Many theologians in our church see a relationship between the first verses of John in the New Testament and the first verses of Genesis in the Old Testament. Isn't that something? How so?

Well, the first verses in John take us back to a point before the creation of the heavens and earth when John says, "In the beginning...". Genesis 1 uses the same words. It says, "In the beginning God..." which clearly implies that God existed before the beginning of time. Yet we see God in community with himself. When it is time to create man, Genesis 1:26 quotes God as saying, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness."