

A GREAT LIGHT
Isaiah 9:2, John 1:1-5

Bethlehem was DARK!

It's not until you get out into a place far from the light caused by human habitation that you really experience how dark it can be

I don't know if there was a moon on the night Jesus was born and we know that star that brought the Magi from the east may not have been visible for another year or two. Bethlehem was dark.

There was no electricity, of course, that didn't come along for another 1900 years. So there were no street lamps of any kind. It was DARK! Physically dark.

But the world was dark. I mean spiritually dark.

God had been silent for hundreds of years. You've heard it said and you've probably said it yourself, "I'm tired of talking and nobody listening!" or "Why do I even waste my breath?!" Maybe that's why he had been silent since his prophet Malachi had uttered the last words from 400 years before.

I don't think so. I know God was not sitting in heaven and sulking and moping that nobody ever listened to him. That's not what God does. Instead he was allowing humanity to stew in our own juices for a while.

As we stewed the confusion and desperation grew. In the book of Judges the people of Israel are described as "everyone doing what was right in their own eyes." and this is what described the world on the night Jesus was born in a dark Bethlehem. The world was a dark place.

Foster read to us from Isaiah 9. He began with Isaiah 9:2 which proclaims,

The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light;

those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,

on them has light shone. Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)

We were walking in darkness and into that darkness came the light of the world. The song gives us a simple truth

Light of the world

You stepped down into darkness

Opened my eyes

Let me see

The darkness was split by the glory of the arrival of the hope of humanity.

The first 5 verses of the Gospel of John takes this visual of light splitting the dark even further.

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 any thing 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. John 1:1-5 (ESV)

Jesus came to be the light of the world. He came to bring life that is abundant and eternal and that life is the light of the world.

He calls us to pass that light on. The world is still dark for those for whom that light of life is only a faint glimmer. We must be that light. We need to be the light that is illuminating the world long after the last strand of Christmas lights is stored away. The light of life shines in the life of the people of God.

With that in mind, let's symbolically pass that light on as we close this time by passing the light of the world from one to the other. Let's light our world. Amen.

Keith A. Tyson M. Div.

ABC Christmas Day, December 25, 2022

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

Luke 2:1-20

I'm lighting the final candle, THE CHRIST CANDLE

One of my favorite preachers, Alistair Begg says this, "*The fantastic story of Christmas is not that we should make ourselves acceptable to God but rather that God has come in the person of Jesus, stepped down into time, in order to provide the answer to the predicament that we face.*"

This is the Gospel! I'm saying that because the very meaning of the word "Gospel" (I know that you almost certainly already know this) is GOOD NEWS! Its good news that that Jesus came into humanity to rescue us from the predicament that without him we are lost. Yes, we are lost. Last night I talked about how we need to be the light of the world to a dark world. It's easy to get lost in the dark – but Jesus Christ, who is the light of life is good news of great joy.

So when the angel appeared to shepherds watching their flocks by night near Bethlehem, and said, "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* Luke 2:10-11 (ESV) he wasn't just trying come up with words that would sound great in a Christmas carol a couple thousand years later. It WAS good news!!! Those shepherds needed that news. Joseph and Mary needed that news! The world needed that news.

THE WORLD STILL NEEDS THAT NEWS! For the past month we have used the theme, A WEARY WORLD REJOICES. It's a play on the words from that song we heard from Ron & Linda earlier which are, *A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices*

For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn'

Our world is so weary. We have the fantastic story of Christmas which brings the thrill of hope to the hopeless. That's good news of great joy. Rejoice, rejoice, Immanuel, has come to us! God with us.

That is what makes Christmas merry. Amen.