

Christ the True Light

John 1:4-9

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How many of you have Christmas lights up on your house or in your yard? Anyone with more than the 25,000 Clark Griswald put up in *Christmas Vacation*? He was determined to win the Christmas light competition by having more luminaries than his neighbors.

This season of the year is filled with lights. Our Jewish friends and neighbors began an eight-day celebration of light called Hanukkah on Thursday night. At its core, Hanukkah is a reminder of how God did a miracle by providing enough oil for eight days over two thousand years ago. This act of God came after He preserved Israel from extinction by giving the Maccabees victory over a hostile enemy and allowed them to rededicate their temple which had been desecrated by the Greeks. Let's continue praying for the preservation of God's people after the terrorist attacks on October 7 because they face another relentless enemy committed to their extinction.

If you'd like to learn more, I highly recommend the latest episode of our 4G Podcast featuring an interview between Pastor Kyle and Gerad Hall about the events taking place in Israel and Gaza. Next week, Gerad will be speaking about Israel and prophecy. You can listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or Amazon Music. For more information, simply go to our website or app.

Lights and Christmas seem to go together, don't they? I love how Pastor Chad and his wife Becky decorated our platform with displays of light. Our EdgeKids choir certainly shined like little lights, didn't they? I love how our Children's Ministry team partners with parents and grandparents to make little disciples. To help families with faith formation, we're featuring a couple resources at the Café. You may want to pick one up for your child or grandchild – *The Jesus Storybook Bible* and *The Christmas Promise Storybook*.

Speaking of little lights, we'll be ending our Christmas Eve services with candle lighting again this year. We'll have four services with nursery and children's ministry available for each one.

- Saturday, December 23 at 5:00 p.m.
- Sunday, December 24 at 9:00 a.m., 10:45 a.m., and 1:00 p.m.

As we continue in our series called, “Before Bethlehem” from the opening verses of the Gospel of John, we’ll see that Jesus is both life and light. Let’s read John 1:4-9: ***“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. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might 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.”***

As we begin, let’s pray the prayer the Lord taught His disciples to pray. We’ll use the more traditional version. At the end, I’ll lead us in a prayer for God to provide our next Children’s Ministry Director and Administrative Pastor. Several leaders will get a status update from Vanderbloemen Search Group this week. We’ll also pray for our Go Team partners in South Asia. After facilitating several home groups over the past six years, they launched their first church service two months ago!

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Because the word **“life”** is used twice and **“light”** appears seven times in six verses, we can conclude John is building off the connection to the Book of Genesis, as He did in John 1:1: ***“In the beginning was the Word...”*** The opening of Genesis is all about the creation of life and in verses 3-4, we see how light was created first: ***“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.”*** My friend Bryan LaBerge made this observation: ***“We actually see the first spoken Word of God...it literally says, ‘And God said, ‘Be Light’ and there was light.”***

Last week we learned how *Jesus had His birth in Bethlehem, but not His beginning, because He has always been.* Our main idea today is this: *Jesus brings life into our deadness and light into our darkness.*

1. Life brings light. Notice verse 4: ***“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”*** John chose the Greek word “*zoe*,” which refers to real life, as distinct from “*bios*,” which simply speaks of natural life. John used the word “*life*” 36 times in his gospel. The second time he used the definite article “*the*” to show Jesus is the true life. This is the idea behind John 11:25: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”***

When we were born, we received physical life. When we are born again, we receive spiritual life. Both come from Him. When Jesus gives you real life, the light comes on for you. I’m reminded of Psalms 27:1: ***“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”***

In Matthew 17:2, at His transfiguration, Peter, James, and John caught a glimpse of the true light as Jesus’ face ***“shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.”*** In Revelation 1:16, John describes Jesus’ face ***“like the sun shining in full strength.”*** Revelation 22:16 refers to Him as the ***“bright morning star.”***

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2. Light exposes darkness. Listen to verse 5: ***“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*** The word “*shines*” is in the present tense, meaning, *“it continually shines and never ceases.”*

Spiritual darkness spilled into our world in Genesis 3 and can only be removed by the Lord who is life and light. The word, “*overcome*” means *“to lay hold of, to seize or grasp.”* It was used in the sport of wrestling to describe getting pinned. John is saying that it is impossible for darkness to pin light to the mat.

Darkness by its very nature refuses to come into the light because darkness and light are mutually exclusive. If you have one, you cannot have the other. Those in darkness cannot readily understand the Lord who is life and light.

Darkness, by definition, isn’t even a thing because it’s only the absence of light. Darkness cannot do anything to light, and you can’t add more of it to a room. Without light, darkness simply takes over. In the presence of light, darkness flees. The good news is when we lean on the Lord of light, we won’t remain in darkness

as Jesus said in John 12:46: ***“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”***

While on maneuvers, the captain of a battleship noticed a light in the dark, foggy night and realized he was going to crash into another vessel. The captain instructed, *“Signal the ship, ‘We are on a collision course; advise you change course 20 degrees.’”* The return signal countered, *“Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees.”*

The captain signaled back, *“I’m a captain, change course 20 degrees.”* The response back was, *“I’m a seaman second class, you’d better change your course 20 degrees.”* By this time the captain was furious and demanded, *“I’m a battleship. Change course 20 degrees!”* The reply: *“I’m a lighthouse. You make the call.”*

Without Christ, we are like a ship lost on the open sea in a dense fog, groping for the eternal shore, waiting for someone to dispel the darkness with the light of salvation. Christ has provided the light in the darkness of our doomed existence, so we can be rescued from certain destruction. Are you walking in the light today or are you still in the darkness? Do you need to change your course?

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3. Light engages witnesses. It’s interesting how the Apostle John seems to break the flow of the passage by introducing the role of John the Baptist in verses 6-8: ***“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”***

Here’s why I think he started talking about John the Baptist. God’s way of letting the light of Christ shine is through human witnesses. According to Matthew 5:16, Jesus has called us to be witnesses of the light as we interact with those who are still living in darkness: ***“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”***

I love it when people tell me how God is blessing their efforts to intentionally live on mission as they follow the nudges of the Holy Spirit. Here’s an excerpt from a recent email: *“For some time now, I have felt a leading to be more Christ-visible at Planet Fitness. One solution would be Jesus-focused t-shirts. Most that I found*

were too busy and I feared the message would not be immediately grasped through a casual glance. Until I discovered this one. Simple, straightforward, and all about JESUS. I bought two and have worn them four times.” When I followed up, he told me he now has five of these shirts, one for each day of the week. Then, he described the gospel conversations he’s already had, including recommending a book of the Bible for a man to study.

This is how he ended the email, “I offered to join him in a Bible study...I pray that it happens. Small steps, baby steps really, but I pray for more open doors. I don’t want to be viewed simply as a good guy, a nice guy. I want to be clearly identified with Jesus through words, actions, and, yes, my t-shirts.”

This member is living as light. We’re called to do the same in our context. One way we can live as light is by inviting at least one person to our Christmas Eve services. Make it your aim to hand an invitation to one person this week – I invited two people on Wednesday and three on Thursday in large part because I had invitation cards with me.

Another way to be a light in our community is by participating in Curbside Christmas this Tuesday from 3:00-6:00 p.m. The idea is to support several ministries and organizations in the QCA by purchasing needed items and dropping them off under the portico. Here’s who we’re supporting and some examples of their needs.

- Pregnancy Resources (gift bags for women).
- Youth Hope (monetary gifts and canned food for their food pantry).
- Active Day Adult Healthcare (hygiene products and Walmart gift cards).
- Domestic Abuse Shelter (women’s and children’s socks, gloves, and blankets).
- Prison Ministry (men’s socks).

A complete list of items is available at the Welcome Center and on our website and app.

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4. Light is available to everyone. Let’s allow verse 9 into our minds and hearts: ***“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”*** The rabbis used the word light as a name for the Messiah, so when John used the

phrase, ***“true light,”*** he was connecting Jesus to the promised Messiah as foretold in Isaiah 9:2: ***“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.”*** The idea behind ***“walking in darkness”*** is someone stumbling as they come and go. While people are walking in the dark, all of a sudden a ***“great light”*** appears and shines into the deep darkness! We can’t find the light on our own, so the light comes to us.

Matthew 4:16 applies Isaiah 9 directly to Jesus Christ: ***“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”*** Interestingly, in Isaiah 9:2, the people ***“walked”*** in darkness and here we see they are ***“dwelling”*** in darkness. The same thing can happen to each of us. You can start by walking in darkness and end up dwelling in darkness.

Darkness in the Bible is often a symbol of divine judgment. According to Exodus 10:21-23, there were three days of darkness ***“that could be felt”*** in Egypt before the first Passover lamb was slain, and there were three hours of darkness before the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world. The ninth plague of darkness preceded the killing of the firstborn and deep darkness proclaimed the death of God’s first-born Son.

Listen to Mark 15:33: ***“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.”*** From noon to 3:00 in the afternoon it became pitch black. It was if God the Father placed His hands over the sun and said, ***“Sun, you shall not shine on my Son while He becomes the sin substitute.”***

Check this out. At the birth of Jesus, a supernatural star ascended to light the way for the Magi and at His death supernatural darkness descended in the middle of the day. His birth announcement was a display of brightness at midnight and the notification of His death was deep darkness at mid-day.

I appreciate the insight of a pastor who said, ***“Christ is no simple spark in the darkness. He drives out the darkness. Jesus not a candle in a cave, he is the sun burning away the gloom and shadows of evil.”***

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Let’s review.

1. Life brings light.

- 2. Light exposes darkness.**
- 3. Light engages witnesses.**
- 4. Light is available to everyone.**

Whenever I hear about Jesus being the light of Christmas, I remember a traumatic time when I tangled with darkness when I was about 8 years old. I've shared this before but it's worth repeating.

My bedroom was down in the basement, away from my four sisters. The only bad thing was that it was really dark at night. I was normally pretty adept at finding my way around in the dark and liked the challenge of finding the bathroom in the middle of the night.

I still remember my route. I'd get out bed, feel for my paneled wall and then find the door. After opening the door, I would turn right, walk through a curtain, touch the water heater on my right, some shelving on my left and would then turn right at my dad's workbench. I'd then put my hands up to feel the ductwork in the ceiling, walk past the furnace, being careful not to crash into the woodpile and finally make it to the bathroom. I could do the whole thing without ever turning a light on. I know that's more information than you wanted to know.

One night, I woke up to use the bathroom. Without realizing it, I had gotten out of my bed on the wrong side. Instead of finding the door, I was on the other end of my room, in complete darkness, frantically searching for a way out. I started to panic. I couldn't figure out who moved the door on me – it must have been one of my sisters!

The more I searched for the exit the more frantic I became. The darkness was so thick I could almost feel it, which started to freak me out. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore and panicked. My heart started racing and I began screaming at the top of my lungs for help. Eventually my dad came running down the stairs, opened my door (which was behind me) and turned the light on. I'll never forget how glad I was to get out of the darkness!

Are you ready to move from deadness to life, and from darkness to the light?
Has the light turned on for you today? A young man was saved last weekend.
Who will be saved today?

Listen again to the words from the "Born Onto Us" song the EdgeKids sang...

*Born onto us the gift of salvation,
Born onto us love's revelation.
Behold the One, God's only Son.*

This song is based on Isaiah 9:6, which reads like this: ***“For to us.”*** This phrase is repeated twice: ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.”*** In Luke 2:11 the angel of the Lord delivered this announcement of salvation: ***“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”***

- In Isaiah, it's in the plural – ***“to us.”***
- In Luke, it's personal – ***“unto you.”***

It's one thing to say Jesus died for the sins of the world; it's another thing to say He died for me. Jesus was born to the whole world, but He was also born ***“unto you.”*** Christmas is His-story, but it must become your story.

- Is He “Savior” to *you*?
- Is He “Christ” to *you*?
- Is He “Lord” to *you*?

Corrie ten Boom put it like this, *“If Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not in me, then I would still be lost.”*

Invitation Prayer

Hear the plea of Jesus in John 12:46: ***“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness”*** and in John 16:33: ***“Believe in the light that you may become sons of the light.”*** If you're ready to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, you could pray this prayer with me.

“Jesus, I'm tired of dwelling in the dark. I confess that my sinfulness has me just stumbling through life. I repent of how I've been living. Thank You for coming into our world and for dying on the cross as my substitute and for being raised on the third day. I believe You are Lord, You are Life, and You are Light, and I now receive You into my life. Please save me from my sins and give me what I need to live under Your leadership for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.”