

Advent 3: 12/17/17
St. Paul: Luxemburg, WI
Text: John 1:6-8
Theme: Christmas Light

One of our family traditions at this time of the year (and I would be willing to bet that many of you do the same thing) is to drive around and look at lights. The kids have always loved to get in the car and drive around and look at all of the different decorations that are put up at this time of the year. When I was a kid that was one of the things that I always loved was when the lights would get put up around the town where I grew up. This was back in the day when towns still put up real Christmas decorations. I can still remember the big white reindeer heads that would be hanging from every street lamp and the Santa Claus that would hang from the bank clock on the corner. And then, the bank on the opposite corner had a manger scene out front that was completely lit up. I still look forward to seeing the lights that are put out at this time of the year.

I know that I'm not alone in that because I will always see other people out doing the same thing, no matter what town I am in. There is something about seeing lights everywhere during such a dark time of the year. There aren't many things that I dislike about winter. I love the

snow and I love the cold. The one thing that I don't like though is the darkness. There is something about seeing lights everywhere penetrating the darkness, and that's what this time of the year is all about. It's about light coming into the world. It is about the light coming and penetrating the darkness that exists in our world and in our lives. You see for Christians that's what's behind putting out all kinds of lights. They remind us that this season is all about light coming into the world.

That's what John talks about in our text. John says that he was sent to bear witness to the light. He tells people that the light is coming into the world. You see John was talking to people who were in darkness, and many of them understood just how deep that darkness was. Their nation was in darkness. Not only were they ruled by foreigners but so many people in the nation had turned away from worship of the true God. People did what they wanted to do. The darkness of sin was heavy upon the land. You see sin is darkness. There were also those people who felt the darkness of their own sin. They were aware of the dark thoughts that existed in their minds. They were aware of the dark deeds that they saw in their own lives.

John came talking about light. You see this light had been promised long ago. It had been promised for the very

first time after Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. Those were dark times. Adam and Eve sinned and they were confronted with the reality that they deserved to die because of what they had done. They were in an absolutely hopeless situation where they were confronted with eternal death in hell. There was total darkness for them. Their situation was hopeless, but then there was a flicker of light. God told them that despite what they had done He was going to send a savior. He gave them the promise that a savior would come and overcome the darkness of their sin. It was that flicker of light that gave Adam and Eve the ability to go on in their lives. That light kept their hope alive.

Adam and Eve thought that light would come right away. They thought they would see the savior, but they didn't. In fact, hundreds and hundreds of years would go by and the light, the savior, still would not come. People were in darkness. They felt the seriousness of their sin. They longed for deliverance in their lives. God sent His prophets time and again throughout the Old Testament to tell them that the light was coming. He told them time and again that the savior was coming. As the time for the birth of Jesus drew closer and closer, the light of

prophecy burned brighter and brighter. God gave more and more details about this savior who was coming.

You see we are still reminded of that here today. That's what the Advent wreath reminds us of. As we see another candle lit each week, we are reminded of how God's people of old waited for the light. We are reminded of how the light of prophecy burned brighter and brighter as the birth of Jesus drew closer and closer. It serves to remind us even today that we are about to celebrate the fact that the light has come, that our Savior Jesus Christ has come into this world.

And we know how desperately we need that light to shine in our lives, don't we? We see darkness all around us in our world today. It seems like there is some national tragedy that takes place on a near daily basis. When some sort of massacre takes place, we see the endless news cycle covering it around the clock. We think of all of the darkness that we have seen in our nation this year. We think of the individual who opened fire on the crowd of concert goers in Las Vegas and how fifty nine people lost their lives and countless more injured. We think of the man in New York City last month driving a truck through a crowd of people while shouting "Allahu Akhbar!" He believed that his Moslem religion called on him to murder

people in the name of Allah. Not only was that individual filled with darkness but his religion is one of darkness as well. We also think of another individual last month who walked into a church in Texas and opened fire. This man was an atheist. It was his atheistic outlook that caused him to be so filled with darkness. He hated the light and killed twenty six people while they were gathered in church worshipping God.

Have you ever been in a situation where you could feel that you were surrounded by darkness? I remember a man telling me one time about his job working on a factory floor. He talked about the kind of people that he worked with and the kind of lives they lived. At the end of his description, he said, "It really is controlled by the kingdom of darkness." When's the last time that you felt that you were surrounded by darkness.

But then there is the darkness that dwells within us, isn't there? You know the kind of dark thoughts that enter into your mind and into your heart. There are so many times when we entertain dark thoughts. We experience feelings of revenge and anger in our lives, and they often times become deeds. We think of the dark things that we at times say to others and the dark things that we do.

It's no wonder that we find such joy in seeing the lights that are put up all around us at this time of the year. We find joy in seeing the light penetrating the darkness at this time of the year. We find such great joy in it because it reminds us of that light that John talks about in our text. It reminds us of that true light that was coming into the world. It reminds us that at this time of the year we are getting ready to celebrate the fact that the true light was coming into this world of darkness.

Jesus was coming to bring us light, and that's exactly what He did. He came into this world so that He could take on human flesh and blood and go to the cross. It was when Jesus hung on the cross that darkness truly reigned. We are reminded of how the sun stopped shining when Jesus hung on the cross. You see that true light that had come into the world was taking the darkness of our sins into Himself. He suffered and died for all of our dark thoughts and deeds. But in so doing, He would also penetrate the darkness and overcome it. It would be three days later that the light would burst forth from the tomb when Jesus would rise and overcome death itself. That light still shines in our lives even today. God comes to us in His Word and tells us that our sins are forgiven. He reveals that light of our savior Jesus Christ. We are given the

very forgiveness of our sins and the assurance of heaven itself. We desperately need that light in our lives today.

That's the light that John talks about in our text. It is the light of Jesus Christ. It is the light that comes from knowing that the darkness has been overcome. Jesus drives the darkness out of our hearts and gives us the assurance that through faith in Him we will one day be delivered from all of the darkness of this world. We are told that John gave witness to that light, and we give witness to that light as well. Wherever God has placed you in your life, you are to be a witness to that light of Jesus Christ. You are to go to people who are in darkness and show them that light of Jesus Christ.

You see the truth of the matter is that Jesus has always attracted people. We think about his birth. He was born in the middle of the night when there was no internet or anything else; but yet, we are told that people from all over the world showed up to see Him. We remember when Jesus visited the temple when He was just twelve years old and all of the religious leaders gathered around Him because they were so amazed by His wisdom. We remember how as Jesus began to teach large crowds would gather around Him. On one occasion, five thousand men gathered out in the middle of nowhere to hear Him preach. On another

occasion, He had to get into a boat and teach people from out on the lake because there were so many people around Him.

You see from the time He was born to the time He died, just like a light, Jesus attracted people to Him, and He still does today. People may at times be turned off by the church, and they may be turned off by "church people." But Jesus still captivates attention. He is an irresistible light. It is our task as Christians to reflect that light in a world that is so filled with darkness. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world, a city on a hill cannot be hidden." We live in a world that is growing increasingly dark. We have light. We have the light that our dark world so desperately needs. You see if we focus on ourselves in the church and hold ourselves up the world senses that something is wrong. It turns people off. It doesn't work in the long run. But if we hold forth Jesus in our lives and in our church, people will be drawn to Him. So, we don't put ourselves in the spotlight. We put Jesus in the spotlight, just like John did. We are told in our text that John came to bear witness to the light.

Some years ago, I was visiting a lady at a nursing home. I went to her room because she was having a difficult day and could not make it down to the Communion

service that I held that day. I remember that it was her ninety seventh birthday that day. As I talked to her, she talked about the Bible passages and prayers that she had learned from pastors from years prior. She told me that her circumstances were often difficult. I didn't know if she meant throughout her life or just at that time, but she said that it was those things that she had learned from God's Word that kept her going. They gave her light in the midst of darkness. But then she went on and told me that she also shared those prayers and other things with those around her at the nursing home. She said that there were people there who didn't know any of those things. She said that she couldn't imagine living in such darkness without having the light of Jesus. So, she shared the passages and things that she had learned. She had received that light that John talks about in our text and she was giving witness to it in her life. We have received that light that John talks about and we give witness to it in our lives. Amen!!!