

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth

### **LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD!**

Christmas lights change everything, don't they? If you put the tree up in your house and then turn off the lights in the room, your house looks the same as it does any other night—it's dark in there! But wrap the strands of lights around the tree, tucking them deep in the branches and along the outer edges and then turn off the lights in the room and turn on those tree lights and the whole place looks different, doesn't it? The Christmas tree and its lights provide a warm glow. It invites you to gaze at it, appreciate the beauty, and gather around it.

The same thing happens on our streets, doesn't it? Normally, you drive home after work during these winter months and it's already dark. Oh, there are some porch lights or garage lights on and maybe some blinds aren't put down so you see some light in a window or two, but still it's pretty dark. But my, how things change at Christmas time! Strings of lights reveal the outline of houses in the dark of night. Lights wrapped around tree branches—and cactus even—allow you to see what is really there in the darkness. And they make things look happier somehow, don't they? We'll even take a detour on our way home sometimes if we know a particular street decorates well.

Candles put on Christmas tree branches are said to have been started by Martin Luther in Germany. In the United States it was Thomas Edison who invented the light bulb and forever changed tree decorating at Christmas in 1880. Today Christmas lights are used all over the world. Christmas lights change the world because things never look the same as they do at Christmas. Those lights make a difference! They tell us it's Christmas and they spread its joy!

Our Christmas lights may make us think of the Light that the gospel writer John speaks of. He tells us that Jesus is the Light. The Christmas message is that **LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD!**

## Jesus is The Word

The Apostle John explains a number of things about Jesus at the very beginning of his gospel. He first calls Jesus “the Word.” Just as a person’s words reveal what they are thinking and how they feel, we find out what God is thinking and how he feels through Jesus. In Jesus God tells the world that it has a Savior who has come to remove the curse of sin and make us right with God. The words of the prophets foretelling his birth became reality as the eternal Word, who created all things, stepped into his creation, born as a human being to serve as that Savior! His entrance brought light and not just the light of glory that shined on the shepherds near Bethlehem.

## Jesus is The Light

John says that Jesus is “the Light,” and not just *any* light, THE Light. Jesus is the divine Light of salvation who entered the darkness of this world. When he entered his creation in a manger on a Bethlehem night, it was more than the nighttime darkness he broke---it was the spiritual darkness that hangs over our world. Into a world that is dark with sin, the Light came!

It’s interesting to look at the word John uses. He says, **The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.** It might also be translated something like “**the darkness has not overcome it.**” What a thought that is! Jesus came to shed light on a dark world, to solve the problem of sin’s shadow over all people. The truth is that Jesus, the Light of salvation was successful! He was victorious! Sin did not win. Death did not win. The devil did not win. Like Christmas tree lights in an otherwise darkened house, the Light of salvation shines, bringing his warm glow to all who look to him. The darkness of the room cannot turn off the tree lights and the darkness of sin in the world cannot extinguish the One who is the Light of salvation... **the darkness has not overcome it.**

The other way to see that word John uses is just the way the Bibles in our pews do and the way it is printed in our worship folder: “**the darkness has not understood it.**” How true that is also! A world full of the darkness of sin does not understand Jesus. All by ourselves, our sinful selves, we do not see Jesus as the Light of salvation. He makes no sense to us. Both explanations express biblical truths and either way we understand John’s words, the point is the same—Jesus is the Light shining in this dark world.

## A witness to the Light who makes a difference in the world

God had planned, long before the Light came into the world, that there would be a messenger who would come first, someone to point the people in the direction of the Savior, a witness to the Light. The gospel writer explains: **There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.** John the Baptist, who we have been hearing about each Sunday in the Gospel lessons, came to prepare people to know Jesus and find in him God’s forgiveness and the promise of heaven.

## **The Light who makes a difference in the world**

John pointed to the true Light that spiritually brightens the world. Even on Christmas Day, as we celebrate Jesus' *birth*, we remember what the Bible says about the perfect life he went on to live and the meaning of his death on the cross. His life and death meant that the light of forgiveness shines on every person. The true Light overcame the darkness of all people's sins. Salvation was earned for everyone. You heard the angels' message to the shepherds: **"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**

Just as Christmas lights on houses and buildings visually change our world at Christmas time, Jesus, the Light sent from God, spiritually changes our world. He is the Savior of all. Unfortunately, many cannot see the Light. John says, **He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.** Generally speaking, when Jesus came into the world, the world didn't recognize him as the Savior and the Jews rejected him as their promised Messiah.

But there were some. There were some who believed. Of all the gifts a person could ever receive, the gift of faith in Jesus is beyond compare; it is the most precious gift. This morning we hear that those who believe have been **"born of God"** and are called **"children of God."** The God of grace calls us to believe

that the helpless baby born to Mary is the almighty Creator,  
that the infant in the manger is the Savior of the world, and  
that one born so humbly is actually the King of kings!

It is only the work of God in sin-darkened hearts that brings that kind of faith! With all humility, we thank God for the gift of faith in Jesus as our Savior and the ability to see him as the Light of the world.

## **The Apostle John was a witness to the Light**

The gospel writer, John, says that Jesus took on human flesh to live here in this world and that he and the other disciples saw his glory. He heard the enlightening teaching and preaching of Jesus. He saw him shine the light of hope into people's lives as he performed miracles. He saw a glimpse of his divine glory when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. He saw the morning light of Easter dawn upon an empty tomb. And he saw the glorious risen Savior. John could write from personal experience interwoven with divine inspiration.

## **We are witnesses to the Light**

It's not quite the same with us. But you and I have also seen Jesus, the Light, as well. No, we weren't there giving birth to him like Mary or kneeling next to his makeshift crib and peering into it like Joseph. We didn't scurry to the manger like the shepherds. We didn't watch him physically grow. We didn't follow him around like the disciples. We didn't watch him die and see him alive again like his Jewish enemies, the Roman authorities or his followers.

Yet we have also seen Jesus. Through the biblical accounts, we have seen all of those events and witnessed the Light of the world from his entrance as the baby Savior to his Ascension departure as the victorious risen Christ. With the eyes of faith, we do see the Light that has come into the world! At Christmas we marvel that God's Son would leave heaven to pay for the world's out-of-control sin. And with Mary and Joseph and the shepherds we recognize that this is just the beginning. He came not for one night, not for one day, but to serve us as the Father's anointed One. And we are humbled. On Christmas Day, we are full of joy and happiness and we may sing a little more loudly, but in our hearts we are humbled. That God's Son would come for a sinner like me is incomprehensible.

Just like lights on the tree tell you it is Christmas, and lights on the house share Christmas joy with those who pass by, children of God are called to share this Light with the world. We know this truth: **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.** The sweet Christ child lying in the manger is so much more than any other baby. We wouldn't meet here in God's house like we do this morning if that weren't so. We know that what John says is true—he is the Light of salvation who has come into the world!

We are witnesses of the Light just like John the Baptist was and just like the shepherds were and just like John his disciple was. You and I have also seen the Light. And it is our turn to share the Light of forgiveness and salvation with the sin-darkened world he came for. On this Christmas Day, with humble hearts we acknowledge Jesus' great love and sacrifice in coming to save us from our sin. We understand the gravity of his birth and the importance of the rest of his life. Rejoice that the Holy Spirit has revealed this to you and share the good news that LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD! Amen.