



## Christmas: The Light Invading the Darkness

In my observation, there are two ways people approach Christmas. One group enjoys it, looks forward to it, and loves almost everything about it. The other group thinks of Christmas and breaks out in hives. They stress over the financial strain of buying presents, the perceived necessity of finding that perfect gift, decorating the house, the cooking of a Christmas feast, not to mention baking snacks for the numerous Christmas parties and programs that must be attended.

But both of those approaches to Christmas really have more to do with our cultural expressions of Christmas traditions than the main event of Christmas: the coming and birth of our Savior, Jesus.

Sometimes, lost amidst the celebrations of Christmas are the facts of the deadly earnest nature of the advent of our Lord. In the Bible, the stark realities of Jesus' coming into the world are painted in hues of black and white, darkness and light. To be sure, accents of the light will highlight bright hope, priceless gifts, warm blessing, and refreshing renewal. But first, the facts to which Darkness and Light speak are sobering. They portray the plight of the world for which the light of the world has come.

The *Plight and Light of the World* is vividly and dramatically expressed throughout the Gospel of John. Darkness and Light are contestants in a "winner-take-all" conflict. But it is in the fifth verse of the prologue of John's gospel (verses 1-18), that the combatants are introduced.

With the coming of the Christ, John declares what amounts to a triumphant invasion of the dark world by the Light. The light shines in the darkness. "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*"

His advent was to have cosmic consequences. John begins his gospel of Christ with notes of beginnings. "*In the beginning*" conjures up in our minds Genesis and creation. But the advent of the Word marks a transition point in history, from the first creation to the new creation, from the former times to the last times. Something happened in the advent of the Word that has left the world irrevocably changed.

But why? Why does the Word have to be made flesh? Why is a new creation necessary? Why does the *Light* have to invade the *darkness*?

What is this darkness? It is the *plight* of the world.

### **Plight of the world**

As Donald Carson concludes in his commentary on *The Gospel According to John*, "*The 'darkness' in John's Gospel is not merely absence of light, but positive evil*" (119). Darkness is the world of evil, hatred — of both the truth and the neighbor (3:20; 1 John 2:9, 11), unbelief and blindness (John 12:35, 46), death and that which is under judgment. John 3:19 says, "*This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.*" So darkness is the power of evil and unbelief.

John portrays the darkness as combative: "*the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*" (v. 5). Some translators suggest the word be rendered "*did not overcome it.*" Either way, there is the suggestion of a hostile reaction to the Light by the darkness.

Throughout John's gospel we see a growing tension between Jesus and the people He came to save. Because unbelieving man is blind, walks in darkness, and his foolish heart is darkened, the darkness did not comprehend the Light. Intellectual and spiritual rejection of the Word eventually issues in heart-hatred and the execution of the Word.

John notes that the plight of the world is pervasive. It characterizes every time, every place, and every race of men. Thus he speaks of the need of "*the true light which gives light to **every man coming into the world***" (1:9). Wherever one goes in this world this darkness is encountered: death, brokenness, alienation, loneliness, war, strife, and sin.

You see, the darkness and death and war and loneliness and brokenness is in us all. It is like the blood on the hands of Lady Macbeth. Sin is in us, it has invaded the old creation. The created order is subject to the curse and men are lovers of the darkness, abiders in the realm of death, and sons of the devil. So too were you and I by virtue of our union with the first Adam — the man of the former (fallen) creation. Because of the plight of the world, the Light of the world has come.

And so John proclaims the Light of the world.

### **The Light of the world**

This Light shines in the darkness (1:5). The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy is upon us:

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined."*

(Isaiah 9:2)

The Word was made flesh. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, breaks into and invades a dark world, a broken world, a lonely world, a dying, death-filled world. Now, a blinding and brilliant Light has come to expose the darkness.

And right away we begin to see that the *Light and the darkness are not equal contestants* in the war of the worlds.

Note briefly what John reveals about the Light of the world. First, this light is identified as the *Word*. "*In the beginning was the Word.*" This speaks of the eternal pre-existence of the Word. John's gospel is unique in how it begins because he doesn't start from Jesus' earthly birth and lineage. He takes us back to the time before the world was even created. Remember Jesus' words in John 17:5, "*And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*" The Word was before all things. He was without beginning and without end. There never was a time when the Word did not exist.

### **The Word was God**

Second, this *eternally pre-existent Word is God*. "*The Word was God*" (1:1). The exact meaning is that the Word was God in essence and character — God in every way. Yet, John carefully chooses his phrases here. John says He was — continually, always, He was God. He also existed *with* God. What John is saying is that God and the Word are both divine, but that they are distinct persons. Jesus has a separate identity eternally, but was God constantly. This is one of the most compact and powerful theological statements in all of Scripture. Jesus was always a distinct divine person who existed eternally in fellowship with the Father (though not explicitly mentioned here). John intends that the whole of this book is to be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God. If that is not true, then this book is blasphemous.

### **The Word was with God**

Third, this eternally pre-existent Word who is God also *existed in eternal relationship*. "*And the Word was with God.*" The preposition *with* expresses the idea of nearness. The Father and the Son were continually face to face. This reveals to us the idea that the Father and the Son had eternally the deepest equality and intimacy.

In John 17:22, Jesus says to the Father “*We are one.*” In 17:24, Jesus says, “*You loved me before the foundations of the world.*” So, here is one who knows a perfect, loving, intimate relationship with God the Father. Together with the Holy Spirit they live in perfect peace and unity. Do you long for a whole, healthy, peaceful, loving relationship with God and your neighbor? Here is the one who is able to accomplish such blessing.

### **The Word is the mighty, eternal Creator**

Fourth, this eternally pre-existent God living in eternal relationship with God is *the eternal Creator*. “*All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made*” (1:3). This is one of those places when we are reading in the Bible and we are about to go on when we suddenly have to put the brakes to our mind: “Whoa! I thought we confess that God the Father Almighty is maker of heaven and earth. Here it says Jesus is the creator. How do we make sense of this?”

“*Through Him*” means the Word is God’s agent in creating. God the Father created, through the Son. The Spirit of God is also an agent. But John does make a very striking point about the extent of Jesus’ involvement in the work of creation. “*All things*” includes every single thing. Literally we could say, “Without him there was not even one thing made.” The Word is the mighty, eternal creator of all things. Think of Psalm 100:3, “*It is He who made us and not we ourselves.*” Jesus made the world and everything in the world, including you! He is the living God and that is why you must hear Him, John is saying, and why you must believe in Him, and why you must submit yourself to Him, and why you must take Him for your Lord and Savior, and why you must follow Him.

### **The Word is life and light**

Fifth, the eternal Word is “*life*” and “*light*” (1:4-5). Now we are approaching the climax of what John wants us to know about the coming of Jesus Christ in these first five verses.

The divine, pre-existent Word who eternally lives in perfect loving, peaceful fellowship and companionship with His Father, who created all things, came into this dark, broken, dying world, full of alienation, war, strife, hatred, and rebellion.

He came as the *eternally living* one. “*In Him was life*” (1:4). Here is hope. Here is the life-giver. The fountain of life: physical life, spiritual life, eternal life, resurrection life. New creation life. “*The first man, Adam, became a living being. The last Adam became a life giving spirit*” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

*The Life was the Light of men.* The life of God to which all things and all humans owe their existence is the source of illumination, life, revelation about all spiritual matters, and the everlasting salvation of sinners.

*The triumph of the Light.* “*And the light shines in the darkness*” (1:5). This is the climax. This is the hope John is drawing us to.

### **Light conquers darkness**

The question naturally arises: is *the darkness as strong as, or stronger than, the Light*? What if the Savior came into the darkness but couldn’t do anything about it?

The Light that shines in the life of Jesus Christ is the life of the creator of all things. By this we are assured that the powers of darkness are not as strong as this life and light because Jesus created the powers of darkness. “Without him was not anything made that was made.” No created thing is more powerful than its creator.

John will unfold the story of the opposition of the darkness to the light of Christ. But for now it is enough to hear John tell us: The light is *continually shining* in the darkness. Jesus, the Light, is

pursuing the darkness with His bright illuminating life, and the darkness has not ever, and will not ever be able to overcome the eternal Word.

What a wonderful picture of the Christ who came at Christmas. He is shining into the darkness of our souls, our minds, reaching out to reveal to us the Father, to love us, to redeem us, to heal us, to bring us into the peace of God, and the joy of God's fellowship.

His person and work and power correspond to every need of this dark world:

Where there is darkness and sin and rebellion? Christ sheds His blood, clothes us in His righteousness, and gives us a new heart to love Him and our neighbor.

Where there is death? He brings life. Where there is war and strife? He brings peace.

Where there is brokenness? He brings healing.

Where there is loneliness? He brings loving fellowship by making us children of the Light, and of the Father in heaven.

So the practical point of John's gospel is: the plight of the world is darkness. But the true Light has come into the world. Be of good cheer, Jesus said, for I have overcome the world of darkness. This Light, even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is marching in triumphal procession throughout the earth!

*"These things were written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name."*

(John 20:31)

Do you believe? This Christmas season, take the offensive with the Light of the Gospel. Raid the darkness. It cannot overcome the Light of the Word.

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