



At Christmastime in the church, most of the time, we talk about Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus in the manger. We talk about angles and shepherds. We've already sung about it. Most of it comes from Luke's Gospel with a little from Mathew, but in John's Gospel, the nativity story goes a little further back than that night in Bethlehem. It evokes the power and majesty of the one that we will come to know as Jesus. We not only learn who is really is, but why he came.

John 1:1-14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Have you ever noticed, we light a lot of candles at this time of year. Of course, we use them symbolically during worship, especially at times like Christmas. But the warm glow can be relaxing and soothing. We now also have electric candles. They have a number of benefits, not the least of which is avoiding getting hot wax spilled on you. But, when they first came out, they didn't look too realistic. These days, if you get the right ones, it can be hard to tell the difference. You need to have the flicker, don't you think to give it that authentic candle

feeling. There is just something about candle light, the ambiance, the glowing. Christmas lights give a similar feeling to me. Their twinkling can be like the flicker of candles.

These days we may not think of candles as practical, but I was reminded of their practicality a few weeks ago when the power went out. It was getting dark, and I couldn't find any in my house!! I wound up using my electric ones. They helped a bit, but the next day ... Let's just say, I won't have to worry about not having enough candles for a while. But it just illustrates the importance of light in our daily lives. It is not merely for decorative purposes. It can mean life.

In preparing for today, I looked up synonyms for the word "light" on a great website called "What's another word for." I think it's my new favorite website, and no, it's not because their logo is a pink pig ... it's not *only* because their logo is a pink pig. So, I was looking for these other words for "light," and I never realized not only how many synonyms there actually are, but the wide variety of ways that we use the word "light." It is not merely that which makes things visible. It could be "Something used to produce a flame or spark." *You gotta a light, buddy?* It could indicate some period of time when the sun is up, "the light of day." I stopped counting at 40 different categories, *categories!* That doesn't even begin to number the actual synonyms. My favorite category has to be "To cover something with spangles." Wow! Then there is the scientific definition of light as a wave of energy that travels through space. There are particular waves that our eyes can detect, which is known as visible light.

What does light mean in the Scriptures? If we look at the very first book of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, after God said, "Let there be light," God separated the light from the darkness into day and night. So, in a manner of speaking, it helps indicate the passage of time. In the Gospel of John chapter 9, Jesus heals a blind man and says that he must do his work while it is day. While he is in the world, he is the light of the world. Here light indicates when things should be done, and who is to do them. However, in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus says that *his followers* are to be the light of the world. Hmmm ... we'll come back to that.

In John's first letter in chapter 2, he says that the darkness is going away and the true light is shining. That loving our brothers and sisters is living in the light, and hating them is living in darkness. That can cause us to stumble (and by stumble he means more like stumble and fall over a cliff). Then in Revelation chapter 22, it talks about how God will live with us and be our constant light. There will be no more darkness or night.

Just from those few passages we can see that light:

- Indicates the **passage of time**.
- **When work** is to be done. Using the metaphor of day, before it's too late.
- It indicates **who** is to do this. Simply, it was Jesus when he walked the earth. After that it is **Jesus' followers**, otherwise known as the Body of Christ. We physically do what he would do if he was still here in the flesh. We act as his body.
- It also reveals things, allows us to see, learn, comprehend, detect danger.
- In that way it is contrasted with darkness.

God turned on the lights, so that we can take in the reality of what is around us. However, as humans our sight is limited. As true as this is in a physical way, it also true in a spiritual way. When Jesus came into the world, it's like the dimmer switch was moved a lot higher. We are able to perceive more.

Neither light nor dark are inherently good or bad. Light can be bad if I'm trying to sleep. Then, I want the dark. Yet, light is very helpful when I'm trying to record a video for a worship service like I am now. The camera doesn't work as well if it is too dark. I've learned the hard way over the last several months how much light this process requires.

You know what is good? Knowledge, understanding, accurate perception. What is challenging is ignorance, misunderstanding, and unawareness. That was the main thing that I learned in my study on the word "light," the ways that it represents revealing the truth or leading people to the truth, like a beacon.

Compared with God we are all ignorant and in the dark. The full divinity of God is like looking directly into the sun. Get too close, and we'll be blinded by that light. We'll be burned to a crisp. The full power, energy, and knowledge of God is beyond the comprehension of our puny little brains. Jesus comes as a light into our darkness. He comes into our world as one of us to help us scratch the surface, to see a bit more to the extent that we are capable. As the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then [when we're in God's direct presence] we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully." (13:12 NRSV)

We all need a little light right now, don't you think? We always need it, and it's starting to sound cliché, but 2020 has really put us all through the ringer. Whether we have directly felt the effects of the pandemic or its fall out through illness, job loss, financial issues, civil rights issues, politics, general worry about all of the above, or merely having to totally rearrange the way we live, it has taken a toll on everyone. One person described it as "The Year of Missing." Many people are feeling the effects of depression.

Mark chapter 6 tells an interesting story. You might be familiar with it. Jesus has been teaching thousands of people out in the wilderness, at least 5000. At the end of the day, the disciples realize that these people would be hungry and suggests that they go to the surrounding villages and towns to get something to eat. Kind of like if you go to a conference, and on the schedule it says "dinner on your own."

Jesus says, no, *you* take care of it. After Jesus blesses the very small amount of food they have on hand, the disciples directly provide this food to the people, thousands of people. As they go along the disciples keep finding that they have enough. It's almost like if you have a lighted candle and you use it to light another candle.

When the disciples mention that there are a lot of people who need to eat, Jesus doesn't immediately solve the problem. Instead, he tells his disciples to act. Jesus is the Light of the world, but he calls on us to reflect his light to make it visible to everyone we encounter.

Has there been a time in your life when you were hurting or struggling and someone gave you hope or peace? This person might have reminded you that you were loved and cared for, or gave you the strength and courage to keep going, or helped you put things into perspective.

Some years ago now, I was in a severe state of depression. Don't let anyone tell you that Christians can't get depressed. They can. I was stuck in this state. For months, it seemed that whenever I was awake tears would be running out of my eyes. It was so bad that the skin around my eyes became raw. Through this time though I was blessed by a person who let the love of Christ shine out of her. She was a beacon for me. Her name is Tammy. In those months she led me around. She took me to her family gatherings. She stayed with me. I know that I was difficult to love in those days, but she did not abandon me. Slowly, incrementally, I was healed. I thank God for that. I also thank God for Tammy because I really don't know what would have happened without her. She helped to lead me back into the light.

A moment ago I mentioned using one candle to light another. It is the method we use on Christmas Eve most years, so everyone can be holding a lighted candle while we sing "Silent Night." We will be doing that "virtually" in a few minutes. One person lights your candle then you light the next person's candle. Before you know it you have a room full of people holding a light, and the whole room is illuminated with the warmth of the glowing light. When we reflect the light of Christ into the world, as that light is passed around, the space is filled with the light of knowledge and truth, that God loved us so much that God through the Incarnation of Jesus, gave us the light of new life. How can you be a reflection of that light in the world today? Think of small ways that you can show others God's love, peace, and compassion during his or her everyday life. Maybe you can be that beacon of light to help lead them out of the darkness. When you do that, the light of Christ burns a little brighter within you. Praise be to God!

Let me pray for you.

Lord Jesus, You are the light of the world, and we cannot thank you enough be grateful enough that you came from heaven to earth. To be born in human flesh and show us the way. To hand off that light to us, so that we can reflect you light when all other lights seem to go out. Even as we walk in the darkest valley, you are with us. Help to lead us through as we help those alongside us. We celebrate your human birth, and yet we know that it was only the beginning of your earthly path to our salvation. In your precious name we pray. Amen!