



Christmas Lights

CHRISTMAS 2022 DEVOTIONAL

Christmas Lights

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of darkness a light has dawned."

-Isaiah 9:2

One of the key markers that the holidays have arrived is seeing the Christmas lights go up! Along rooftops, lampposts, in the trees; there is something dazzling about watching them sparkle and how they can transform something ordinary into something incredible.

Two thousand years ago on the very first Christmas, the Light of the World stepped into a place that was ordinary and dark and forever transformed it. This Christmas, join us at Colonial Woods as we look to the Light, and see how Jesus is still illuminating places that are dark and transforming lives.



Christmas Lights

Christmas Devotional 2022 by various authors

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Let there be light...

WEEK #1

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light"

-Genesis 1:1-3

Christmas Lights

by Pastor Phil Whetstone • Scripture — Luke 2:8-14

*Christmas night | Another fight | Tears we cried a flood
Got all kinds of poison in | Of poison in my blood
I took my feet to Oxford street | Trying to right a wrong
'Just walk away' those windows say | But I can't believe she's gone
When you're still waiting for the snow to fall | Doesn't really feel like Christmas at all*
-Coldplay, "Christmas Lights"

Some of you can identify with the sentiments of that song. The news doesn't really improve throughout Coldplay's song of the season. For many the phrase "Doesn't really feel like Christmas at all" is a reality not only this year but this time each year. Let me take you back to Christmas Eve, year 1 A.D. Four hundred years of silence had covered the land of Israel. A people who regularly had heard the "Voice of the Lord" for the previous two millennia through prophets and ministers of Yahweh had now experienced silence since Malachi voiced the final call from the Lord. Like one who had given up on hearing from a long lost friend or family member, ten generations of Jews had been waiting to break through the silence... and breakthrough He did.

I encourage you to read through Luke 2:8-14.

It's interesting the promises the angel declares:

- **Good News and Great Joy**- They needed some good news! They had experienced four hundred years of bad news: occupation by the Romans, silence, and spiritual void. We can get discouraged if a morning service seems a little low on energy...imagine four centuries of low energy!
- **Savior**- The One who can bring you out of your place of need and rescue you.
- **Christ the Lord**- The One you have been waiting for is here.

Those promises are still God's declared promises for you. No matter where you find yourself this year, the Lord really does have **Good News**.

So have you been lonely? Disillusioned? Dealing with a new family reality? Or just simply feeling inner turmoil? Peace is possible, His presence is available, and no matter how silent you feel God has been, He is ready to break into your world.

Like Father, Like Son

by Pastor Chelsea Zalewski • Scripture — Genesis 1:3-4

"And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness." -Genesis 1:3-4

I love the book of Genesis. It lays such a foundation for everything that follows in the rest of the Bible. God is such an intentional author and as we read His Word we start to see incredible patterns and themes. One of the themes that is present throughout all of Scripture is LIGHT.

- **Psalms 18:28** - "my God turns my darkness into light."
- **Psalms 119:105** - "Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path"
- **Micah 7:8** - "when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me"
- **John 9:5** - "I am the light of the world" (Jesus)
- **1 Thessalonians 5:5** - "You are all children of the light"
- **John 1:5** - "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"

Light is used to symbolize God throughout the whole Bible. I remember a professor in college speculating that perhaps one day when we all get to heaven, we will suddenly understand the connection between God and light. Perhaps it's not just an analogy, but God actually IS light. In Genesis 1 the very first words we see God speak are the words "Let there be light". Perhaps the very first thing He did in all creation was infuse our dark and formless world with His radiant presence through light.

It was not a coincidence when Jesus stepped into the scene thousands of years after creation and declared "I am the Light of the World". The God who said "Let there be light" sent His Son to banish darkness once and for all.

The God of Genesis is the same God today. No matter what your circumstance this time of year, God is stepping into your story and saying "Let there be light". He wants to light up the dark places, He wants to infuse your heart with the radiance of His presence. When your God is the God of light, darkness loses all of its power.

This Christmas, invite the God of Creation, the Light of the World, into whatever place is dark in your life. His light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not, will not, and never-in-a-thousand-years ... overcome it.

After the Silence

by Pastor Ann Harrington • Scripture — Luke 2:13-14

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'" -Luke 2:13-14

Four hundred years have passed since God last spoke through the prophet Malachi. Four hundred years of silence from God. His last words were not great ... they were words of judgment. "You have wearied the Lord with your words", Malachi told the people. And while there was going to be hope for the future, God was done talking for a season.

Sometimes I wonder if I weary God with my words. My anxious words, my negative words, my critical words, my demanding words ... words that show my lack of listening to anything that God has been trying to tell me. Sometimes, if I am honest, it feels like God is silent.

Have you ever felt that way? That no matter what you do, you just don't seem to hear from God? The Israelites knew that feeling very well. They were desperate for something from God. Some sign that they were still connected to Him. And I love that while God was quiet for a season, He had certainly not abandoned His people ... He was waiting for the right time to restart the conversation.

Fast forward 400 years to a bunch of shepherds sitting out in a field in the dark watching their sheep ... and an otherwise silent night becomes the scene for a heavenly choir concert that announces that God is ready to communicate with mankind again. The night is filled with lights and the glory of the Lord shining around them, and heavenly hosts singing. It's a night like nothing anyone had ever seen before or since. God had something to say and He was going to say it through Jesus.

In an instant everything changed. God was now going to be walking and talking with us in person. And because Jesus came and lived among us; because he gets us ... we don't have to fear the silence. Even when it seems like He is quiet, He is still near. He is still Immanuel ... God with us. So even in the silence, even in the darker moments of life, we can live with a peace that God loves us, desires to be with us, and is always only a whisper away.

Bright City in a Dark World

by Pastor Jayson Tuckey • Scripture — Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." -Matthew 5:13-16

Growing up as a kid from the country, living five miles out from a small town and over an hour from the nearest freeway, I learned that night is really dark. We lived on the top of a large hill and from our house we could see both Cass City (my home town) and Caro (the next closest). At night, they would be all lit up and it even created a glow on the clouds on an overcast night. When you're on a long car ride as a young kid, before the Internet and portable devices, all you can look forward to on a car ride is what you can see out the window. And at night, corn fields are kinda boring.

I always looked forward to driving through towns at night and seeing the town all lit up. Our downtown usually had Christmas lights up year round. And on our trips back from our grandparents several times a year, I knew there were 5 towns that we would cross through that I could look forward to. I looked forward to them because light represents life, and I wanted to look around and see life and not just darkness.

We as Christians also have a light. This light is eternal life and is the hope for mankind. Yet for so many Christians, either out of embarrassment or fear of rejection, we would rather hide that light from the world. It's easier to be a Christian around other Christians. Often our assumption is that the world doesn't care about our message. That they would rather not hear about Christ and what He has done for us. And to be fair, we have been conditioned to assume that in our culture. But what we fail to realize is that there are so many wandering through the car ride of life on a dark highway at night, looking for the light to give hope. We are that city all lit up in the night. We are the light of the world and we have a responsibility to share that light.

So what are you going to do this week to shine your light? Who do you know in your life who is wandering in the darkness just looking for a city? And how can you do your best to not hide the light from them?

Be a Pilot Light for the World

by Pastor Brian Ake • Scripture — John 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:6

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying 'I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" John 8:12

"For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6

Many years ago, I was a missionary pilot along with my wife and kids to hundreds of missionary families living throughout the Caribbean. Many times, I would be flying at night out over the ocean on my way back home to Florida with many missionary families and supplies in our DC3.

On some flights the night sky would be clear but with no moon in sight. While flying at 11,000 feet all you could see in front of you were small lights from below you, in front of you and above you. The small lights below and in front, of course, were homes or small towns which dot the Caribbean on many islands. The lights above were stars and planets. At some places along the route of flight, it was difficult to pinpoint the horizon because small lights from everywhere all blended so seamlessly together. It all looked like the sky. It could be deceiving. But a quick scan of flight instruments gave me confirmation that all was well, I was straight, level and on course. Then, in due time, I was able to see the lights of the coastline of Florida and knew I would soon arrive safely home with my passengers.

The Lord taught me much about "BEING A LIGHT" through flying. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 we are reminded that God, through Jesus, put His light within us so we can grow in our knowledge of God and Jesus and then share that light with others.

I want to keep asking the Lord everyday to help me not take for granted the "Light" that He has shone in my heart. What an honor, privilege, and yes even responsibility to share the knowledge I have of the light in order to successfully spread that Light to others.


Let's be the best pilots we can be.

Tangled Lights

WEEK #2

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."

-Ephesians 5:8



Christmas Can Be Messy

by Pastor Bruce Ake • Scripture — Luke 2:7

"She gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." -Luke 2:7

On most every day of the year, a messy living room floor would not be a welcomed sight. However, if it happens to be Christmas Day, rules of cleanliness are gladly suspended. In fact, messes are encouraged. After all, who doesn't completely enjoy the excitement, the laughing, screams of happiness that I got just what I wanted, or maybe even the tears of joy when kids open the box and find a puppy. Yes, when we see the children's faces light up it is actually enjoyable to see wrapping paper flying all over the room. We all have volumes of photos of Christmas messes.

Unfortunately, there are other messes during the holidays that can take place that aren't so enjoyable or planned. Take a look at Mary in Luke 2:7; *"She gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."* We can imagine the mess – a cattle trough versus a cradle, the smells of a barn versus a clean room, even torn pieces of cloth versus new baby clothes.

During the holidays, what mess exists in your life? Maybe some relationships are severed, feelings of hopelessness for the future, worry, doubt, financial insecurity, or maybe extreme sadness brought on by the loss of a close friend or family member.

There is good news for those of us who struggle with messes during the Christmas season. Jesus wants to meet us in our messy lives to give us hope. Jesus met Zacchaeus in the tree, the Samaritan woman at the well. He met them where they were and He will do the same for us.

What can you do? Reach out to Jesus, share your mess with Him. Talk with a friend. You can know that you are never alone as you journey through the messy situation. God loves you and will never give up on you. Christ will give you hope. Trust the Lord at His Word:

"So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." 2 Corinthians 4:18 [NLT]

Take a Nap & Trust God

by Sean Hurley • Scripture — Matthew 8:23-37

"Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'" -Matthew 8:23-37

It's Christmas time and the whole family is busy doing all of the wonderful Christmas activities. One person is missing however – it's Uncle {Insert Name}! Well, they are not "technically" missing, but they are asleep in the lazy boy and missing out. But maybe they are practicing something spiritual?

The anxieties and worries of prepping for, the actual day of, or just thinking about the aftermath of Christmas are real. But let's take a lesson from Uncle {Insert Name}. Like him, have you ever fallen asleep or slept through something that would've woken up a rock? I have. In some weird places too. Sometimes it's because I was running on absolute zero and needed to rest. Other times it's because wherever I was and whoever was around made me so comfortable, I let my guard down, had faith that I was safe, and I was going to be okay because things were under control.

In Matthew 8, Jesus was asleep on a boat in the midst of a storm that caused so much concern that everyone else was panicking and woke Jesus up yelling, "Lord save us! We're going to drown!" Jesus replied with "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then He got up and calmed the wind and the waves to a complete still.

Christmas time and life in general can carry a lot of storms and keep us restless with worry and concern. Instead of staying up all night or running until we are empty, all we need to do is call on and trust in Jesus. Even we can rest during the most chaotic seasons or worst of storms because He is in control and He is safe. Take a Nap & Trust God!

Simply Come

by Pastor Katie Johnson • Scripture — Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." -Matthew 11:28-30

I love decorating for Christmas! It's one of my favorite seasons. I love all the lights, the smells, and the cozy feeling that Christmas brings! But the decorating process creates quite a mess! If you are like me and you love a flocked Christmas tree the mess is real and sometimes serious! Typically I'm not someone who likes messes. I like things to be in their places and for my house to be tidy (I mean there are weeks though where that definitely doesn't happen). But sometimes "messy" is really stressful to me.

The story of the first Christmas is the story of a series of completely unplanned, messy events. There was the surprise of a pregnancy, an unexpected journey that Mary and Joseph had to make, and the hotel accommodations that were not exactly up to code. I don't know about you but I would be completely stressed out with that mess!

But God doesn't say to us, "Alright, before you can come to me, make sure that you have your mess in order. Then we can talk." Thank goodness, right? God didn't wait to send His one and only Son into the world until His children had their act together. No, He came to the world as it was imperfect and really messy!

Not only did He come into a messy and imperfect world, He hung out with and chose individuals who were messy to be His disciples! People who didn't have it all together, ones who were messy, and who were imperfect. Yet, Jesus still chose them! Matthew 11:28 tells us that we are to come to Jesus as we are. Even if that is tired, worn, burned out, or messy. You will find rest in Jesus.

So instead of trying to have the perfect, clean Christmas spirit before you go to God. Instead of trying to clean yourself up. Simply come to Jesus.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me..." -Matthew 11:28 (MSG)

Easily Entangled

by Pastor Dan Hamrick • Scripture — Hebrews 12:1-2

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." -Hebrews 12:1-2

At the end of every Christmas season we take down the lights that we hang around the house. I feel like I try to, very nicely, place the lights in such a way that the following year I can easily hang them up without having to untangle them first. Yet, every year, as we go to put up the Christmas lights, they seem to be tangled. It is so frustrating, because it takes so long to untangle that mess and get them ready to hang up. Yet, when it's all said and done, and the lights are all hung up the way they were meant to be, you can't help but stand back and stare at their beauty.

I feel this can be a very real description of our relationship with the Lord sometimes. We try hard to honor the Lord with our whole life. We go to church on Sundays and Midweek, read our Bible when we think of it, and even pray before meal times and bed. And yet we can find ourselves in situations that just don't honor the Lord the way we know we should be.

The author of Hebrews tells us that we need to *"throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily ENTANGLES"*. I wonder what that is for you this Christmas season. Is it the busyness of work, the idea that we need to keep up with the Jones', a relationship that needs to be fixed, a bad decision that we need to make right, or simply more time spent with your Savior?

Regardless, the author of Hebrews encourages us to keep running the race that God has placed before us and to not give up. We are told to *"fix our eyes on Jesus"*, the perfect, untangle light in our lives. I have a feeling when we can keep our eyes focused on HIM, it will be even better than when we finish getting our Christmas lights hung up, stand back, and look at its beauty.

What is hindering you this Christmas season from fixing your eyes on Jesus the way you were called? My encouragement is to untangle yourself from that and run your race the way you know you were called.

Picture Perfect Christmas

by Christina Stein • Scripture —Luke 2:19-20

"But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." -Luke 2:19-20

I love Christmas! The lights, the decorations, the food, the traditions - all of it! As a mom, I wanted to give my kids the perfect Christmas. Advent calendars, stories and blog worthy crafts. Christmas music playing, Christmas lights glowing, the perfect gifts they were sure to love wrapped and arranged just so. And, of course, the camera is ready to capture every magical minute. Sounds amazing, right? Except for the year we lost power. Or the year my son's gift got lost in transit. Or when my daughter was almost two and walked into our living room filled with all this perfect Christmas magic and wanted nothing to do with it, at all.

We all have visions for the "perfect Christmas", but seldom do all the things we plan go smoothly or happen at all. We live in a culture where the fear of missing out is strong. We want to make sure we have all the experiences, all the fun, and make all the memories. As parents, it grows stronger wanting our kids to have all the magical memories we had growing up. There is nothing wrong with wanting to make memories or have traditions. However, if you weren't planning to post the picture to social media would you be doing it right now?

The first Christmas was simple and I would dare say that it didn't go at all how Mary thought it would. Although Mary was a person of great faith there must have at least been a glimmer of "this isn't the way this was supposed to happen". I can't imagine that she hoped to be in a strange place without her family to bring her son into the world. But after a seemingly endless and chaotic night, Mary held her beautiful baby boy. Angels lit up the night sky and filled the air with song and a special group of people were able to witness a promise fulfilled - God among us.

This season my prayer for all of us is not to get caught up trying to have the picture perfect Christmas. Embrace this season, all the bumps and turns it takes. Keep your focus on a crazy and chaotic night that was the very best Christmas of all.

Follow The Light



WEEK #3

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

-Matthew 2:1-2

New Every Morning

by Lisa Henry • Scripture — Matthew 4:16

"The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." -Matthew 4:16

Our family has a tradition of watching the sunrise when on vacation in the mountains. We wrap up in blankets and sit sipping warm drinks in quiet anticipation of the first burst of sunlight over the horizon. Without fail, on clear mornings, the sun rays peak out at us, immediately bringing a welcome warmth to the new day. We watch in delight as the gray, shapeless land surrounding us becomes touched by the light. Little by little, as the sun ascends and pours over the landscape the depth and unique qualities of each hillside becomes filled with color and detail. We know this will happen every morning whether clear or cloudy, and yet it still brings a thrill.

Imagine the overwhelming joy when Jesus, the long awaited light of the world, burst into a world lost in the hopelessness of the shadow of death. The wait was long. So very long. The anticipation of His arrival was anything but quiet.

Unlike the sunrise, this light had not yet been seen. God's people waited and hoped for His promise - the One who would bring forgiveness and restored relationship with the Father. They trusted the Lord's faithfulness. In times of despair and utter darkness they clung to their hope and cried out:

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." -Lamentations 3:22-23

And then, Jesus, the long expected light of the world, burst into the quiet darkness.

This Christmas, I pray that we will experience the Lord new, every morning. Let us each look for and follow Him daily. As we sit with Him, in anticipation of His words filling us with truth, may His light pour over us defining our unique qualities of being created in His image. Let His light bring more depth, detail and color into our every day. He delights in us; may we look forward to the thrill of following Him.

The Blue Plastic Block of Terror

by Pastor Tim McCulloch • Scripture — Micah 7:8

"Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light." -Micah 7:8

Ouch!! You feel the pain shooting through your heel. The pain is unmatched by anything you have felt in your life. It is as if one thousand little pins are piercing through your foot at the same exact moment. All you can do is muster enough strength to fall back into your bed.

In your moment of extreme pain, you think through how you got to this place. The time was just slightly past midnight. Your stomach was rumbling, exclaiming that you had not eaten for at least two hours. The kitchen was calling you out of your cozy bed, but it was dark. You would have to rely on your memory of your home's layout.

Hunger and darkness is what got you to this point. Upon stumbling out of bed for the kitchen, your nemesis, the blue plastic block of terror, pierced your skin. If only you had turned on the light, you would have seen that Lego. Now, that blue block gloats over you as you writhe in pain.

As believers, we must realize that the enemy will put obstacles in our path to cause us to stumble and be in pain. The enemy will use darkness to hide the truth from our eyes. To be brutally honest, I would fathom a guess that we have all fallen prey to those traps of the enemy at some point in our lives. We have found ourselves nursing wounds caused by stumbling over those obstacles.

The Israelites found themselves in the darkness of captivity when the verse from Micah was penned. Although they were in darkness, the Israelites knew that the Lord's light would pierce through the darkness. That the darkness and all that was hidden in the darkness stood no match to the light. As we consider how powerful light is this week, I would challenge you to remember that the darkness that may surround you currently stands no chance to the Light that has come. The enemy CANNOT GLOAT over your missteps and stumblings in the darkness.

Focus on the light that is cast by our Lord, Jesus Christ. He has given us victory over the darkness. Throw aside that blue plastic block of terror to bask in the rays of hope only Jesus can provide.

The Star of Bethlehem

by Pastor Chelsea Zalewski • Scripture — Matthew 2:1-2, Isaiah 40:26

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'" -Matthew 2:1-2

We often see stars on the top of Christmas trees and a part of Nativity scenes. We know that the Magi followed some kind of spectacular star to find Jesus, but what do we *actually* know about the Star that the Magi followed?

- It signified birth.
- It signified kingship.
- It had a connection to the Jewish nation so Herod didn't recognize it.
- It appeared at a precise time.
- It led the Magi as they went south from Jerusalem and stopped over Bethlehem.

There has been some incredible study done in recent years that points to the science and significance of the Star of Bethlehem, so if this topic interests you, I'd highly recommend checking out *"The Star of Bethlehem"* DVD by Rick Larson (also available on YouTube).

What Rick Larson's study reveals is that the Star of Bethlehem wasn't just a nice anecdote to the Christmas story, the star was a significant piece that announced the arrival of the King of Kings. Stars orbit in specific and mappable patterns, which when studied and reverse-engineered to the approximate time of Jesus' birth, reveal a sky of stars dancing and shouting of the newborn King!

"Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name." Isaiah 40:26

God was using pieces of His creation to announce His Son's coming. This is especially incredible when you think about the fact that when God set those stars in motion at the dawn of creation, He did so knowing the exact moment His son would enter the world thousands of years later.

But here's the thing, Herod missed the Star that was right in front of him because he wasn't looking for it. And that can happen to us too. We can get so lost in the flurry and busyness of the season that we miss Jesus. So let's be certain to slow down, look up to the sky and see how all of creation still points to the King of Kings, our Savior Jesus.

Light is Hope

by Lester Killion • Scripture — Psalm 18:28; John 1:4-5; 1 Peter 3:15

*"You, Lord, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light." -Psalm 18:28*

I had a plumbing issue at my house years ago that caused me to have to go from one side of my house to the other in the crawlspace. The entrance was in one corner and the leak that needed to be fixed was in the opposite corner about 100 ft away. The journey required me to hunch over for a few feet, then hands and knees, crawl for a few more feet until eventually I was on my belly going under pipes and ductwork for the remainder. I reached the spot and repaired what I needed to just in time for my flashlight to die with no other light source. It was dark, the darkest I have ever been in. I started to get worried thinking about my return journey until I looked behind me and saw the smallest glimpse of light from the entrance. I had hope!

We spend this time of year celebrating the birth of Jesus as the light of the world. Shepherds were visited by an angel of light to share the good news and Magi from the east followed the light of a star to seek out Christ. Christmas time is such an exciting time with decorations spread throughout communities. Areas that may have been dark are now so bright with different colors of lights, candles, and tinsel. Areas that were already lit are even brighter at Christmas because of the season. Light is such a representation of Christmas and the birth of Christ for all to experience. It is hope!

The combination of the light of Christ and our hope in Him is enough to drive away any amount of darkness. We can find ourselves crawling, lost or out in a field but all we need to do is follow the light and it will bring us hope. This Christmas, look at the lights with such praise and reverence that it drives away anything that doesn't need to be in your life. Jesus was born to bring the ability to trust in Him and be an overcomer. He is hope!

Jesus is Coming for Dinner

by Pastor Jayson Tuckey • Scripture —Luke 10:38-42

"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'"
-Luke 10:38-42

At one point or another we've all had guests over to our house. Maybe a friend, or boss, or someone who is so important that you felt like you needed to pull out the red carpet, make your best meal and even use that "fine china" that you would only usually use on Christmas Day and maybe Thanksgiving. Maybe your kids even used the phrase, "what, is the Pope/Queen coming for dinner?"

But what if Jesus came over for dinner? Wouldn't you do your absolute best to take care of Him and make the best impression possible? Most likely He's gonna be coming over for most of the day; you'd probably want to make refreshments and be prepared to entertain Him. Social norms during the time of Jesus are even more clear about a host's responsibility to take care of their guest. And on top of all that, your family decides to hang out with the guest instead of helping to prepare. That's not just irresponsible, but rude.

Yet in spite of all of that, Jesus made it clear that beyond cultural norms, social imperatives, important tasks, chores, work load, busy schedules, work, school, soccer practice, and even family, our first priority needs to be listening at the feet of Him. To spend time with Him and to learn more from Him. We have all made excuses to ourselves at one time or another for why we won't make time for Him. Reasons why we don't take time to pray or to spend time reading the Bible. But sometimes we need to be reminded of what Jesus says to all of us, "*[your name],[your name]*" *the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*



Shining Lights

WEEK #4

" Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

-Isaiah 60:1-3

A Light Has Dawned

by Pastor Ann Harrington • Scripture — Isaiah 9:2

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."-Isaiah 9:2

I have never been someone who liked the dark. I don't like going for walks at night and I don't like not being able to see what is out ahead of me. I am not much for camping, for a variety of reasons, but mostly because I am not a fan of sleeping in a tent in the dark in the woods. I mean, come on, a nylon tent is not a lot of protection from whatever is out in the dark.

On the few occasions when I have had to go camping, my favorite thing is when the sun starts to rise. When dawn was breaking ... the light begins to push back the darkness and everything starts to come into focus. In the dark you don't see things clearly. In the dark my imagination would come up with the craziest things. But when the sun starts to rise it reveals what is really happening there in the woods. It reveals the beauty of nature, the majesty of the forest. It is the arrival of the light that reveals the truth.

When Jesus came to earth, He came as the Light of the World. He came to bring hope. He came to illuminate truth and to push back the darkness of sin and rebellion. John 1:4-5, *"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* The light of Jesus exposed the darkness for what it was and pointed to the truth of the hope found in Him.

When Jesus returned to heaven He left us with a mission. To be the light to the world around us. To be the ones who shine the light of Jesus and bring hope to a world in need. The world we live in is desperately in need of truth. People are walking around in the darkness believing the lies of the enemy and they need the light of truth to shine in their lives. The only way they will see that truth is if we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and shine the light of hope that we have found in Jesus.

Matthew 5:15-16 "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

We have a responsibility to be a light to the world. How are we doing?

Ain't No Rock

by Todd Perkins • Scripture — Luke 19:36-40

"I tell you," Jesus replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." -Luke 19:40

In 1987 there was a song written with the following lyrics, *"Ain't no rock gonna cry in my place. As long as I'm alive to glorify His holy name."*

The mention of rocks crying out in this song can be found in the context of the triumphal entry—Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem a week before He was killed. Jesus rode on the back of a borrowed donkey's colt, and multitudes of people praised Him as the *"king who comes in the name of the Lord."* (Luke 19:38) When the Pharisees in the crowd heard the people praising and worshiping Jesus, they said to Him, *"Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!"* (vs 39) The Pharisees knew they had no ability to quiet the excited people, so they called on Jesus to stop the crowd from praising Him.

"Jesus replied, "I tell you, . . . if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." -Luke 19:40

Jesus responds by stating that people's praise for Him should only be encouraged and never extinguished. Colossians 1:16 reminds us that all of creation was made for God's glory.

I find it easy to get excited about small things, family gatherings, games, time together, etc. and there is nothing wrong with that. However, when it comes to sharing Jesus, the Light of the World, my excitement often turns to worry and apprehension. I worry about how people might respond to my invitation to one of the Christmas Eve Services, how others will respond when I share how Jesus has changed my life, and to the hope and grace that only He can give. Often, the Light that is the very reason for my existence is one that I show the least amount of excitement about.

During this season, and every season, may we never allow ourselves to stop praising the name of Jesus for His birth, sacrifice on the cross for the sins of all humanity, and His resurrection. May we always be "shining lights" in a dark world that points people to Jesus and the Father's love for His creation. May we never allow *a rock to cry out in our place* of how wonderful and praiseworthy Jesus is.

A House of Lights

by Pastor Dan Hamrick • Scripture — Matthew 5:16

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." -Matthew 5:16

Each year, around the middle of December, our family piles into the minivan, goes to Tim Hortons, orders hot beverages and a large box of Timbits, and then drives around the city looking at Christmas Lights. For one to two hours we drive slowly through neighborhoods judging who has the best lights and why. Each person in the car has different criteria. It could be the house with the most lights, most different colors, coolest design, most creative, or just pretty. This tradition has to be one of my favorites of the Christmas season.

In the book of Matthew we are commanded to *"let your light shine before others"*. When I read this passage I often think of us being the houses in the middle of the Christmas season. People pass us everyday at work, school, when we are shopping, in our homes, even on the roads as we drive to and from places. I wonder what type of light people see when they pass us on an everyday basis?

The word "shine" means "to give off or reflect light". The light we are supposed to shine and reflect is that of Jesus. The passage goes on to say *"that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* This means that everything we do should point others to Jesus. How are you doing at that?

What are ways you can "SHINE" you may ask?

- With our **WORDS** - Showing respect
- With our **SPIRIT** - Be kind, grateful and forgiving
- With our **FAITH** - Trusting God and His Word
- With our **PURITY** - Keeping our heart, soul, and mind clean
- Always pointing back to the **LIGHT** source - Make it about HIM not you

Our goal should be to bring glory to God. There's a fine line between being a light and putting on a show. It's a matter of the heart.

Where is your light shining? Who would people say you reflect? If you were a house of lights, being judged on the criteria of how you shine Jesus, what would people say?

Endless Source of Light

by Lisa Henry • Scripture — John 1:4-5

"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." -John 1:4-5

It is so fitting that we use lights to decorate for Christmas. Candles burn with seasonal aromas and gentle, dancing flames. Lights twinkle on trees and softly glow within nativities. They peek out of porcelain Christmas villages and adorn buildings and homes. The lights of bright stars and brilliant angels are displayed to retell the story of Jesus' birth. All of these lights are most noticeable, most beautiful, most impactful when shining in the dark.

Christmas lights shine and help create an atmosphere of celebration and joy. But, they have limitations. Bulbs burn out. Fuses blow out. Cords wear out. Without a connection to the power source, the lights become dark.

Are there times when you feel disconnected? Do you ever feel like your reflection of His light is limited? During this most wonderful time of the year, sometimes we're exhausted. But we have hope. We don't have to generate the energy for the light within us. We are not left in the dark without a power connection. We have a different source of light, an endless source of light; Jesus.

*"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."
-Psalm 119:130*

When we're burned out or worn out, His light can still shine brightly through us. Even when our fuses blow, He has overcome the darkness. In our weakness, He is strong. We pour out His light, love, and hope with His strength, not our own. Maybe these are the most illuminating times for His light to be noticed in the dark. His words softly unfolded and shared are beautiful light for those lost in a dark world. His peace, patience, and love shared through our authentic, humble imperfection are a beacon in a broken world.

This Christmas, as we celebrate and retell the story of Jesus' birth, let us stay connected to the one true source of light, the ONE who has given us life and who shines in our hearts. And let us shine for Him.

The Quiet Before the Calm

by Pastor Phil Whetstone • Scripture —Isaiah 53:4-6

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:4-6

Ever heard the phrase, "the calm before the storm"? I have a different one, the "quiet before the calm". You may not be thinking about quiet or calm as we are on the cusp of a Christmas Day celebration. You have likely experienced crowds and urgency in the grocery store. You may be preparing for Christmas Eve Services, or a family meal. Maybe your home has been filled with loud voices or maybe deafening silence due to broken relationships.

On the first Christmas Eve, the night Jesus was born was just a night, people doing whatever people did. Families sitting down for a meal. Siblings fighting. Innkeepers caring for tired travelers. Shepherds out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks. We aren't told what the night sky was like, but I like to envision a clear sky, bright stars, a chill in the air...and calm. Christ who came into the world certainly caused a stir, some would call it a storm, but scripture ultimately calls it PEACE. He brings us Peace. Peace from having to strive under our own power. Peace with the God of the Universe. Peace that comes from knowing that no matter what happens in my life I am right with the one who matters most. And the certain peace that when this life is over, I have a far greater eternal life ahead. That's peace! But remember, peace isn't free. Peace rarely is. That Peace was paid for. The prophet Isaiah wrote those words in Isaiah 53 *"The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."*

Peace seldom comes without a battle, and Christ came to our world, lived the perfect life, and fought a Holy battle for our peace on the cross. So while we enjoy peace in all the ways mentioned previously, I invite you to join me in celebrating and reflecting on the ONE who bought that peace through His life, death and resurrection.

*"Silent night, holy night! All is calm, and all is bright. | Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.
Holy infant so tender and mild | Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace"*

Merry Christmas! -Pastor Phil

Notes

We hope you enjoy this Christmas devotional!

For more Christmas fun, check out all that's happening at Colonial Woods!



www.cwmc.church

