

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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December 25, 2005
Christmas Morning
John 1:1-14
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm of the Day: Psalms 98
Second Lesson: Hebrews 1:1-9
Gospel: John 1:1-14

Jesus is the Great Christmas Light

Over the course of my lifetime, Christmas lights have changed, they have evolved, and I have heard before my time that Christmas lights looked a little different on a Christmas tree. I never saw it in my lifetime, but maybe some of you here have seen actual candles burning on a Christmas tree. Anyone remember seeing that when you were growing up? I have been told about it, but I have never seen it. I can't imagine doing it now, especially our tree at home when we forget to water it and it starts shedding needles faster than anything you can believe.

When I was growing up I remember helping Dad put up the Christmas lights outside and they had those big honking bulbs on the end. They looked just huge, mammoth in my little hands. I thought they looked as big as the bulbs I had seen in a light socket. They weren't, but from my eyes they looked that way. As a little kid they sure seemed heavy enough. Then lights got smaller. Then they got to look like icicles. Then they got programmable and they would dance around the house and go faster and slower and this way and that way. Then fiber optics got stuck into some trees and all of a sudden your tree looked like you ate some funny mushrooms or something as the colors changed on it.

Christmas lights have changed. There is no denying it. But every single one of them has something in common—whether it was the candle that was lit before electricity or the lights that were plugged in after electricity—every Christmas light that a Christian puts up on a tree or on a house is done to remind them of Jesus, the Great Christmas Light. That is exactly what John talks about when talks about the Word becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us. When you read those Words from John 1, you can just take out that phrase “*the Word*” and put in “Jesus” because that is exactly what he is talking about. The Word is a name he uses for Jesus. Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us for a time. That is John's Christmas message.

But notice what he says about this Word. He says he is not like any other light. Other lights might try to remind us of him, but he is unique when it comes to being any light in the world because he is the Light that is full of grace and truth—the grace and the truth that you and I are born just desperately needing.

John says, “In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. Through him all things were made”—the same thing that our reading from the Hebrews said, right? He is unique in that he existed before he was born in Bethlehem. He existed before there was a world. Before there was sunrise and sunset, before there

was summer and winter, fall and spring, before there was anything, there was Jesus Christ, the true Light. And before any of those things happened, before there were brake lights, before there was sunlight, before there was daylight and moonlight and starlight and all these other lights, there was Jesus Christ. Before any of those things existed, God knew that you and I would need this unique Light that is a light like no other—true God and true man.

You and I need a Savior who is true man so that he is under the law to live the life that we cannot live. He had to be true God so that he could die the death we were doomed to die and have it count in our place to take away our sins. If he is only a man and he is perfect, it only counts for him. If he is only God, then he is not going to be under the law in our place as someone who is under the demands of the law because he is the lawgiver who is above the law. But he becomes unique—true God and true man.

There were others that might have thought someone else could be the Light. Some thought John the Baptist was the light because he preached so authoritatively about repenting and baptism for the forgiveness of sins and he pointed people away from himself and to the true Light. The people knew something was different. God enabled John to carry out this ministry so that they would know that something is close at hand. Something we better look for. Something we better pay attention to. That is why God gives us this unique Christmas Light, so that we can know that this is someone special, so that we can know this is someone that we desperately need.

He comes full of grace and truth because that is exactly what we need. He says he had come into the world and his own did not recognize him. He came to many of his own people but because they were looking for a different kind of deliverer, they didn't recognize him. You and I could read the life of Christ, but if God doesn't work in our hearts, we would never recognize what grace and God's truth is really all about. We think peace on earth means just the stopping of wars, getting along with our neighbor. We would stop short of the glorious truth of what peace on earth means. It really talks about the war that is there between you and me and God. We are born not on God's side. We are born separated from God because of our own sinful nature. God tells us the wages of sin is death. He doesn't make any outs for that. He says sin demands death. He doesn't say he was just kidding and we should go ahead anyhow like a parent might say with a child who has misbehaved. But God said the wages of sin is death. So we needed a Savior that could come and bring us that grace and live in our place and die in our place to take away our sins.

Our sins are very obvious to us, if we are honest. Even at this time of the year, not only do we light lights to remind us of Jesus, the Light of the world, but we exchange gifts at Christmas time to remind us of how our God gave us the gift of a Savior. That is the whole thing of exchanging gifts. That is why we do this tradition, to remind us of Christ. And yet our own sinful nature can warp that tradition, can't it? Do you ever fight with your brother or sister about which present mom and dad like better, theirs or yours? Do you ever say, "I gave a better gift than you did"? Do you ever say, "My gift is better than yours"? Our sinful nature can warp even the most wonderful things, can't it? That is why we need grace and we need truth. We need the truth that we are sinners and that

we need someone to take away that sin. God's grace sees to it that we don't have to face that death we were doomed to die. Instead he sends Jesus.

The cradle in Bethlehem is intimately connected to Calvary because Jesus didn't come just to teach some interesting things, to provide a new idea, or to be a revolutionary. He came to provide righteousness as the letter to the Hebrews said. He came to do it so that it would last forever—that his kingdom would be forever. His earthly kingdom wasn't even established in ways that we would expect. It was established through his life and his death and taking away our sins. Now that the Spirit lives in our hearts and we have seen his glory, we become like the room—we reflect the light of God's glory as we live for Jesus, as we share Jesus with others and as we give gifts not only that are wrapped in shiny paper, but as we give the gifts of life serving our Savior, as we give the gift of pointing people who don't know that they sin and need forgiveness by pointing them to Jesus as the only answer to their sins.

That is how we turn the light on. We can do it in a lot of different ways. We can do it with big bulbs or little bulbs or programmable bulbs, but you and I have been blessed to be able to share the message and reflect the Light of Jesus. That is what we do.