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## CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHINES IN A DARK WORLD

John 1:1-14; Christmas Day; December 25, 2025

Those of you who attend both the Christmas Eve and Day services understand what I'm about to describe. The settings of the two main Christmas services could not be more different. Christmas Eve is a candlelight service. Most of the Luke two Christmas Eve Gospel takes place at night: shepherds, angels, and the Baby Jesus lying in the manger. At the end of the Service last night, we turned off all the lights in church, lit our handheld candles, sang "Silent Night," prayed the Lord's Prayer, and ended with "Joy to the World." We arrived in darkness, sang in the darkness, and went home in the darkness.

Although it is the pale light of a late December morning, today we arrived in daylight, we will keep the lights on in church the whole service, and we will go home in daylight. Sometimes we have a fresh snowfall for Christmas that becomes dazzling white in winter sunshine. This year we got puddles of melted snow and muddy brown grass. The John one Gospel Reading for Christmas Day, though it mentions darkness, focuses on the Light of the Word made flesh. God sent His Son as Light for this dark world. God's Light has overcome the darkness, much like the sun has risen and turned the darkness of night into day. Like the order of the days of creation, there was evening, Christmas Eve, and there was morning, Christmas Day.

John began his Gospel with allusions to the creation account. Genesis one: **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth... [John one:] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made."** [Genesis:] **"The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light... [John:] In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The true Light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."** God gave light to the world in the beginning, and then man brought darkness into the world through sin. The world needs God's light in Christ.

John reminds us that, though the world may look sparkling clean under a fresh snowfall, in reality, it is more a muddy mess of sin and death. Until this world comes to an end, the sun will continue to rise in the morning and set in the evening, but no matter what time of the day, the world is full of darkness. There is a spiritual battle between the darkness of evil and the light of God going on. It's a fight for our bodies and souls, and it oftentimes looks like the darkness is going to win and overcome the light.

Sometimes the darkness comes from within us. It is the darkness of saying and doing things that Christians should not do. We bring darkness into the lives of others when we should be shining the light of Christ on them. Not wanting to be exposed doing this, we try to hide our darkness from others in the privacy of our own homes or in the dark recesses of our minds. Others might not see the darkness that is in us, but God does because nothing is hidden from God's sight.

And there is the darkness that the devil works in our lives and the lives of others. He does this by destroying the order of God's creation and replacing it with chaos and sin, sickness and death. There is also the darkness that others bring into our lives by what they say and do to us. There is the darkness of failed hopes and dreams for our lives, in our families and relationships, in our vocations and work, and in our weak bodies that fail us. The things we built for ourselves, or hoped to build for ourselves, have failed us, and we wait in the darkness for what remains of our lives to come unraveled.

**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.** God's Son came as Light in this dark world to dwell among us in our own flesh and blood. The word for "dwell" John uses is the same one for the Old Testament tabernacle-tent where God chose to dwell among His people. The dwelling of God was where the people brought sacrifices to God, especially in atonement for their sin. Sinners cannot come near to God in their sins without dying, so God accepted the sacrifice of a clean animal in exchange for sinners. A perfect animal was slaughtered instead of the sinner, and God credited to the sinner His own perfection. God dwelt among His people to share His grace so His people could draw near to Him.

During the Exodus to the promised land, God showed His presence at the tabernacle in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. God chooses to dwell among us now and forever in His Son's flesh. In these New Testament times, when we are overshadowed by sin and death and internal and external darkness seeks to creep over us, the Light of Christ still shines in this dark world. **The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

When Jesus died in darkness on Good Friday, it was to break the darkness of sin and death and bring light and life back to God's creation. In the tabernacle of His own flesh, God's sinless Son was slaughtered for the sin of the world. In the darkness there was Light, and though it looked for all intents and purposes that the darkness had won, it had not. In the full light of day on Easter the grace and truth of the glorious cross of Christ was seen clearly in His resurrection.

Eternal life is ours through faith in Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem and the Man of the cross and empty tomb. Later in John's Gospel Jesus said: **"I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"** (8:12). We will follow Jesus from death to life because the blood of the Babe, the Son of Mary, *"The silent Word is pleading"* (LSB 370:2) for our forgiveness.

The blood of the Word made flesh cleanses us from all sin and raises us to live in His light forever. The Word made flesh dwells among us to shine His light on us as we gather in His presence to eat and drink His body and blood in the Sacrament. Christmas Day is described as the festival, or feast, of the Nativity of Our Lord, because Christians feast today on His holy body and blood.

I find both the darkness of Christmas Eve and daylight of Christmas Day to be good reminders of why we celebrate our Lord's Incarnation. As we gather in the darkness of Christmas Eve, we light the candles we provided for ourselves to scatter the darkness of the world around us as we worship the Baby laid in a manger. As we gather on Christmas Day, it is in the light of day which God Himself created. **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 Cor. 4:6). **God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.** (1 Jn 1:5). Amen.