

Isaiah 9:2

2020 Various: The Light of Christmas

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I love Christmas lights. After Thanksgiving my wife and I decorated our front yard with Christmas lights. We actually got into a bit of a contest. She decorated the bushes on one side of the house, and I decorated the other side. Which side you think is better? That's right. The right side! My side. Now which house do you think is better? Our house? Or this house in Wilmington that won \$50,000 for their Christmas lights display? They won ABC's "The Great Christmas Light Fight." Tim Keller says (you guys know I like Tim Keller, right?), "[Christmas] lights are not just decorative; they are symbolic." What do these lights symbolize? What do they tell us about Christmas?

Lights being symbolic of Christmas actually pre-dates the birth of Jesus. 700 years before the birth of Jesus, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah said God was going to send his light into the darkness.

Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

What does this mean? What does it mean that the people were "walking in darkness"?

Humankind lived in a state of darkness. (Isaiah 8:19-22)

The people Isaiah prophesied to were living in a state of darkness and alienation from God. They were blinded by their sin, but they didn't realize it. It was like they were colorblind, but they didn't know it. They couldn't see God's truth. They only saw their truth, which wasn't truth at all. Isaiah says of the people:

Isaiah 8:19-20 (ESV)

19 And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?
20 To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

If the light is symbolic of Christ, the darkness is symbolic of control, emptiness and anger.

1) Control

The people in Isaiah's time had access to God. They could go to the temple and pray and offer sacrifices, but instead they choose to go to "mediums and the necromancers." They'd rather talk to the dead instead of the living God. It's because they don't want to hear what God has to say. They don't want to submit themselves to "the teaching and the testimony." If they go to God, they have to do it God's way. It's much easier to try and get control over the spirit world, and do life on their terms. Whenever we approach God to get what we want out of him, whenever we think we can bend God to our will, we confirm that we're living in darkness.

For some of you, that's really hard to hear. You want to be in control of your life. You want to be in charge. Have you ever seen those commercials that say something like, "Give the gift of health this Christmas?" Maybe it's for the newest Fitbit or Peloton or filtered water-bottle. You know what those commercials are really saying, "You're fat but we can help with that." That could be Peloton's slogan, "You're fat but we can help with that." Or... you could take charge of your fitness by ignoring gyms for the rest of your life and never going to your doctor's office. Isn't that what we kind of do with God? I don't want to know if I'm spiritually unhealthy, so I won't go to church, or if I do, I won't really let the Spirit move. I'll get in and get out before he can catch me. That's living in a state of darkness. When we ignore God's teachings so that we can live in the outer-regions of our spirituality, we're lost. That will leave us empty and angry.

Isaiah 8:21-22 (ESV)

21 They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. 22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

The darkness is symbolic of control, but also emptiness.

2) Emptiness

Those walking in darkness are "greatly distressed and hungry..." If you're hungry, if you're never satisfied, if you're stumbling around looking for something to satiate you, you might be in the darkness. This is especially true at Christmas time because Christmas is all about hungering for the next best thing, a new car, the newest game console, the newest styles. Those things might fill that inner hunger for a bit, but the hunger pangs come back. Charlie Brown gets it. Lucy tells him Christmas is "a big commercial racket" run by "a big eastern syndicate." Something about the way the world operates leaves us empty. That's darkness. Charlie yearned for the true light of Christmas. Linus got it when he reads about the birth of Christ. The darkness is symbolic of control, emptiness, and sadly...

3) Anger

The people look up to heaven and are "enraged" and they "speak contemptuously against their king and their God..." Intrinsicly, we know that when things don't go our way, it's God's fault. That's why there must not be a God, because a good God would always see things my way, right? So we get angry, wound ourselves, and wound others. Do you find yourself always trying to be in control and yet feeling empty, even angry? That's a sign you need Christ. You need Jesus' light.

Maybe you think you can fix yourself on your own? I love Christmas lights, but I can never fix them when they go out. Have you ever tried to fix a light strand when a bulb goes out? What's the trick? Some of the strands at my house are about halfway burnt out. I tried replacing the first bulb with one of the extras they give you in a tiny plastic bag, but I've never been successful. Just like I've never been able to fix my lights when they break, I'll never be able to fix my need for control, my emptiness, and my anger. When we try, we just make the problem worse. We need a light, a solution, external to ourselves. We need light from the outside. That's why I pray, "Lord would you give me joy?" We remember the light of Christ as we sing:

Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Bethlehem gave us that light.

God sent his light into our darkness. (Isaiah 9:2, 6)

There was nothing and there is nothing we can do to fix our problems, to turn on the light, so God sent his light into our world.

Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

We've seen a great light. God sends his light into the world to save anyone trapped in an endless battle for control, broken with emptiness, or filled with anger. God sent his light into our darkness. What kind of light has shone? The light of a baby.

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

We did nothing. We were in the night, in our sin, in ignorance. We didn't build fires. We didn't evolve into better human beings. We didn't solve world hunger or create world peace. But somehow the light still came. That's because God sent his light in the form of a baby, a son.

“A child is born”

In the Old Testament, whenever God showed up, it was sometimes terrifying but always dangerous. He came as a smoking fire pot to Abraham, as a pillar of cloud and fire to Moses, and as a raging storm with smoke and thunder on top of Mount Sinai (listen to Timothy Keller's 1991 advent sermon on Christmas). God is dangerous, un-contained, fiery hot. But here, God contains himself, God is still dangerous, but he's also safe. He's like Aslan from Narnia, not safe, but good. God becomes a baby.

“The government shall be upon his shoulder”

He's not just any baby. He's king. All the weight and hope of the world rests on him.

“Wonderful Counselor... Prince of Peace”

He shows us compassion. He's our “Wonderful Counselor,” our “Prince of Peace.”

Why is he called a “counselor”? When you are going through something very difficult, it's good to talk to someone who has walked the same path, who knows personally what you have been going through. If God has really been born in a manger, then we have something that no other religion even claims to have. It's a God who truly understands you, from the inside of your experience. There's no other religion that says God has suffered, that God had to be courageous, that he knows what it is like to be abandoned by friends, to be crushed by injustice, to be tortured and die. Christmas shows he knows what you're going through. When you talk to him, he understands. *Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth Behind the Birth of Christ* by Timothy Keller.

God understands what it's like to live in darkness because he came and lived in our darkness and then bore our darkness on the cross. He did this to give us his light.

“Mighty God, Everlasting Father”

While the Son of God may become a baby, a baby does not become God. Jesus is still that fiery pot, that cloud of fire and smoke, that raging storm. He deserves our worship. He is God in the flesh and nothing but absolute devotion is appropriate.

A couple weeks ago our power went out for several hours and it really scared Elijah. He was really frightened so we lit up a whole bunch of candles and set them around the kitchen and in the bathroom. That helped, but what really made him feel better was watching... Daniel Tiger. Daniel is kind and good. But we should never forget. He's still a tiger. He could rip you limb from limb. I want to see the PBS episode where Daniel Tiger takes down his first antelope. That's the kind of light God sent his light into this world.

What will you do with Jesus, the light of the world? (John 8:12)

You know how every gospel account opens differently? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? The Gospel of John, chapter one, opens by identifying Jesus as the light.

John 1:5 (ESV)

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

It talks about Jesus as the light all the way through verse 9 (see John 1:5-13). But in chapter 8 Jesus actually identifies himself as “the light of the world.”

John 8:12 (ESV)

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.”

So there's an implication here. **What will you do with the Jesus, the light of the world?** Will you stay in your own darkness, or turn from yourself, and step into the light of Christ Jesus? Will you repent and believe and receive the “light of life?” Or will you stay in the dark?

I really love all the Christmas lights out this time of year. I was admiring all the Christmas lights as I was driving to CrossFit. Did you really think I was going to get through this sermon without mentioning CrossFit? Timothy Keller and CrossFit. These are a few of my favorite things.

I love seeing the golden yellow strands wrapped around trees, multi-colored Christmas light displays, and any sort of Christmas lights. But no matter how many lights I plug in, even if lights hurt my eyes like that guy's house from Wilmington, it's still not the dawn. All the Christmas lights in the world can't make it day. Only God can do that. And one day, he will. The darkness will flee and the Son will light up the night sky for all eternity. The dawn will come with Christ forever and ever and ever. Merry Christmas. Let's pray.

John 8:12 (ESV)

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.”

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above. You can also listen on [Apple podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be in a state of darkness? What is the darkness?
2. What ways do we typically try to get out of the darkness?
3. How did God send light into our world?
4. What is so special about this light?
5. How will you respond to God's light sent into this world, Jesus?

Sources

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