

Who Is Jesus: The Light

John 1:1-18

What do you love about Christmas?

One thing I love, is the lights.....

I'm the light man...that's my main Christmas decorating job.

Get the tree straight in the stand, and then string the lights on.

My philosophy of Christmas tree lights is like my philosophy of seasoning food when I'm cooking....if a little is good, more is better.

When you plug in one of my decorated trees, it looks like a phosphorus grenade gone off.

I love the lights.

I remember as a child turning out all the lights in the living room, plugging in the tree with its multicolored bulbs so hot that the room soon smelled like a Fraser fir toasty.

I'd shove aside the launch pad of presents and lie on my back beneath the rocket tree, looking up from underneath through the giant kaleidoscope.

Squinting one eye then the other, the lights whirled and danced a dance of beauty and wonder...

Mitch Miller and the gang sang "Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright....and it was.... and the peace was heavenly.

"In him was life" John says in his gospel, "and that life was the light for us all."

Living in the light of Jesus Christ is like that for me...
It is like having your eyes opened in a dark world to a kaleidoscope of beauty and wonder in life, and beneath his shadow to know a peace that the world can neither give nor take away, that can only be called heavenly.

I love the light Christmas....the light of Jesus Christ.

I'm a Christmas light man.

I remember driving up in the sandy dirt backyard that looked like it has been swept clean by a broom, because it had....
parking next to the oak tree that Hazel wrestled with and mostly won...

Tumbling out of the car beneath the starlight of a Macclesfield Christmas eve sky.

Headed for the light....that streamed out of the kitchen door window...

Coming out of the dark and into the light...greeted with a bear hug by my aproned grandmother who smelled of biscuits and glowed like a matronly German frau.

We gathered around the table to eat and to laugh, to laugh and eat some more, we gathered around the piano to sing, the tree to open presents....

Then back out into the cold dark night, warm all the way home because we'd been held so tight in the warm, loving light.

"In him was life," John says, "and that life was the light for us all."

The light of Jesus is like that, making us children John says, born not of the flesh or blood, but of God....making us brother, sister, parent, child drawing us in to a family...a family of faith, hope, and love....giving us a home....a table around which to gather....

The family light of Jesus is beautiful light....it was shining right here in this sanctuary last Sunday.....our children and young people singing of the Light, dancing in the Light, waving their wings in the light....Daddies and Mommas bringing in the littlest ones who are the source of the biggest joy.

What was it in this sanctuary last Sunday? That light was so bright even with those blinds closed you could have worn shades.

It was bright shining joy....not just because kids are sweet and do and say the darndest things, but because the good news of the gospel of Jesus is especially beautiful on the lips of children and his light in their faces....Jesus himself thought so and fought like mad to keep them front and center in his kingdom.

An adult interloper, my one line in the play...."Where is he who is born king of the Jews?"

I didn't need to ask.

I could have told you where he was..... he was right here....in this sanctuary, especially right here in our children

That's not the only place, you know.

His light's shining so bright in this church....

Where do see it shine?

All around in this church, the light is shining.

This Sunday, we will gather again right after church.

Ten elders and deacons, those you elected....we will gather as we have the last three Sundays for Officer training.

We'll eat together, then settle down in the Parlor in a circle.

There, one by one, they have told their story of faith in Jesus Christ, and of journeying in his light.

If today is like the rest, there will be laughter and not a few tears.

And, as each one finishes their story, the others will get out of their seats and gather close around, close enough to touch, to lay a hand upon a shoulder, a head, a neck, a hand.

And they will try to speak out loud in prayer what their touch says more articulately....that we belong to him, and we belong to each other, and I thank God for the light of Jesus that I see shining in you.

"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? I've have seen his star here in the east, and the west, to the north, and to the south.

It's shining in the choir room

It's bright in the Chapel and in the kitchens

It's shining in the library and the office

It's bright in the Sunday school classrooms

It's brilliant in McChesney Hall.

You're shining as a light of Jesus, the Light...

And you know what he said.....You are the light of the world....a city set on a hill cannot be hid neither do folks light a lamp and put it beneath a lovely building....but on a lampstand so it will shine for everybody.

Uh oh....

It's easy to shine in here...behind lovely walls and in the company of mostly lovely people....but it's a whole, different matter out there.

There's some deep, deep darkness out there....darkness as deep as Tom Shaw's voice...but without a hint of its loveliness.

Out there is the darkness and the Prince of Darkness grim....and every now and again, he gets his foot in the door here.....and nothing pleases him more.

You know the darkness out there.

One Christmas eve, I was between the second and third of three services.

The church emptied out....I was left alone.

It was a sweet time....the service had gone well....the sanctuary still smelled of candlewax and perfume and love light.

There wasn't enough time to go home before the late service...not really....and there was, besides, work still to do on the midnight meditation...

What I needed, I decided was a cup of coffee.

No Keurig in sight, and most everything closed....but Tolley's Shop and Go was still open for shopping and going....

It was nearby and I went inside for a cuppa.

A fresh pot was brewing.

I had to wait, with a line of others.

It was a very cold night.

I didn't mind.

I was still glowing inside with the light of Christmas eve service love.

A man rushed in the door with a force that rushed his odor ahead of him.

He smelled like too many cigarettes, too much cheap wine, and a lot of anger.

Another man in the line said, "I thought you was going back home for Christmas."

And the man fumed, "I'm heading there now with a gun and if I can find that man who's been messing round with my woman I'm gonna kill thatand out into the Christmas Eve night poured a string of G's and D's and M's and F's and S's O's and B's.

One minute the night was as bright as a Mitch Miller sing along.

The next it was total eclipse of the sun.

Except for the Prince of Darkness' grin.

I took my coffee and melted back to the protective basket of the church.

I had time to think about this thing.

I thought of how the words stung....words like these sting with their coarseness....but on a Christmas eve they stung me like a Portuguese Man o' War.

But then, in the quiet, I heard Jesus say...."What's the matter with you?

Tolley's Shop and Go is the world I was born into, remember?"

And when I thought about it I knew he was right.

Scarcely had the straw of the stable stopped steaming when a man, probably smelling off too many cigarettes, too much wine and anger, but a most powerful force in the land called out, in his best impression of Little Red Riding Hood's grandma wolf, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? I want to worship him, too."

But then Herod turned to his henchmen and whispered, "Find him and kill him, that....well you know....lots of g's and d's and m's and f's and s's o's and b's.

You know that story...every child under 2.....and when they finished, Bethlehem brown turned red and Rachel wept for her children...and would not be comforted...and still weeps.

And though dark Herod failed to get him, a few decades later, bright minded church people and political leaders did not.

Remember, many hailed him as king and the crowd joined in.

But all the heysanna hosanna sanna sanna hey's of that Sunday gave way to the g's and d's and m's and s's o's and b's of Friday...when we strung him up on a tree that with a sting far worse than a Man o' War.

And when it was all over the powers that be propped their collective feet on their desks and congratulated themselves for getting him at last and shutting him up in the dark.

"But you remember something, my brother," Jesus said to me.

"The darkness is not dark to my Father...even the deepest night is as bright as the day....he can take a pitch dark tomb and make it shine like one of your Christmas trees."

I love the light of Christmas...because it's sweet, yes, but even more because it's tough, tougher than hell, tougher than death, tougher than a rock hewn grave....

"In him was life and that life was the light for us all. The light has shined in the darkness and the darkness has never overcome it."

Never has. Never will.

No matter how hard the dark out there or the dark that sometimes seeps in here tries, it never will.

Never.

One of you not long ago played a guessing game with me.

"Guess my favorite Christmas carol," you said.

I offered the obvious choices

O Come All Ye Faithful...no
Joy to the World....no
Silent Night...no
Hark the Herald...O Little Town....O Holy Night...no

Turns out it was Longfellow's poem.

"I HEARD the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

I believe that...do you?

Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, was not born, did not live and die, and rise again so that we could hide his Light behind these walls much less confine our Christmas to decorating up, fixing up, fattening up, shopping up, drinking up, partying up in an orgy of ups.

His light is not meant for hiding, but for rugged shining.

And I close with a story of a bright shining, sharing light I read about this week.

Peter Claver, a farmer's son, became a Jesuit Priest and Missionary who gave his life to ministering to slaves who arrived in port from Africa, stacked like cordwood on shelves below deck, row on top of row, with 30 inches of clearance....for the 8 week journey.

Many sick and dying from the squalor.

Peter Claver buried the dead....a third of the cargo.
He did his best to rescue the dying, often giving up his bed to a sick slave
while he slept on the floor at his side.

He did not have much....only faith in Christ and in Christ's own light, by
which Peter Claver could see that these people were not chattel nor
cordwood for other's using up, but were Christ, himself.

Once, when the nurses he had induced to help him ran from the room,
panic stricken before the disgusting sight of some rancid, putrid sickness,
he was astonished.

"YOU MUST NOT GO," he cried out.

And you can hear his astonishment that they could forget such a truth.

"YOU MUST NOT LEAVE HIM....IT IS CHRIST!"

I see Peter Claver standing there
I can see a light in his face.

It's **the** Light of Christmas.

I want to be a light man like that.....not just a stringer of Christmas trees.

