

## Christmas Light

*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but born of God. (John 1:9-13)*

Prayer:

Christmas and light go together. Midnight services sung by candlelight. Lights strung on the houses and on Christmas trees. Blinking, twinkling lights. Colored lights. White lights. Candles. Can't seem to get enough of them. In Bethlehem, some two thousand years ago, light came into the world. Heavenly light. True light. Primal light. The Source of all light. God of God, Light of Light. A Light that existed before God said, "Let there be light." A Light that will shine long after sun, moon, and stars are snuffed out.

In Bethlehem, some two thousand years ago, life entered the world, life conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Word of God made human Flesh. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Light and life. The opposite is darkness and death. People turned from God and into himself prefers darkness to light, death to life. He hates the light and wants to snuff it out. He hates the life and wants to kill it, abort it. King Herod wanted to kill the Light.

Bethlehem, His hometown, had no place for Him and His virgin mother. They are turned away from the inn, left to fend for themselves. His lodging was a cave. His bed, an animals feeding trough. He came to His own things, His own world, His own people and nation, but His own people did not receive Him.

Welcome to earth, O noble Guest. Had we known you were coming, we would have prepared a nice room and fluffed the pillows. Next time please call ahead and make a reservation. We were just too busy to take notice, too preoccupied with our selves to believe that you would come to dwell with us like this. You know how it is.

We have such important things to do. God knows how it is. He knows how thick the darkness. He knows how deep the death.

- ❖ A young family is killed in a head on collision by a drunk driver.
- ❖ A father dies leaving a young son without the needed guidance and support for the difficult years ahead.
- ❖ Thick darkness such as Racism, hatred, we have polluted this beautiful creation with our desire to have more, wars and rumors of war.
- ❖ After divorce, children are shuttled from home to home, forced to celebrate someone else's holidays like little trained circus bears, bribed with costly gifts they don't need, with no one to care for their tender souls.
- ❖ An old man rocks back and forth in his chair. No one lived as long as he. And now he's the only one left and all alone. He can't remember the last time someone visited him. He wants very much to die, but even that is denied him.

God didn't intend for this - this darkness. He filled the darkness with light. He filled with world with life. He breathed life into humanity and made him alive with the breath of God.

We brought this darkness, upon ourselves. We did it by not hearing God's Word, by not keeping it in our hearts. And we mustn't blame Adam and Eve. We do the same every day. Pushing our will against God's will, doing what pleases us instead of what pleases God.

Serving ourselves instead of serving others. Breaking our promises, divorcing ourselves from those who really need us, running from our responsibilities.

Elevating ourselves by stepping on others. We do it to ourselves. We try to blame God, but in the end we're responsible. And we each add a little to the darkness, to the death. And so, we fumble in this darkness.

We experience the loss, pain, heartache, separation, sickness, and death. We grab for anything that promises us light and life: Quick cures. False religion. Junk science.

Bad philosophy. Drugs. Alcohol. And with each grab on our part the further slip into this darkness, God shines His Light. He came to join forces with us, to be on our side, to become one with us and one of us. He came to dwell among us, full of grace and truth. He knew we couldn't do it, we couldn't save ourselves from the darkness and the death.

"The Word became Flesh." God became man, and not simply a man, but a baby cradled in the Virgin's lap. "For God so loved the world that He gave....." But no religion has a God becoming a flesh and blood human being beside this one. Natural theology cannot bear such a thing as this! God is human. God is born. God hungers and thirsts. He cries and wets and burbs. He bleeds, and suffers and dies. This is the Gift that was laid in the manger for us.

Jesus Christ is Light and Life. He is a Light no darkness can overcome. Not the darkness of our sin, nor the darkness of our death can overcome Him. He is stronger than the darkness of our souls, stronger than the death that threatens to overcome us. He overcame them. He conquered them. He freed us from their chains. Not with a show of strength, but with a show of great weakness - a fragile Infant dependant on his mother.

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light," said the prophet Isaiah. "Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." Light and life came to us in the form of a child.

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

Every other government depends on power. It rests on the shoulders of its citizens. But this government rests squarely on the shoulders of a little Child, a Child who is old and wise enough to be named by such lofty labels as *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

This is no ordinary Child who was born in Bethlehem, that's what Isaiah is saying. This is the eternal Word, through whom all things were made. This is the Light before there was light. This is the Life before there was life. This is the eternal Son who is with the Father from all eternity. This is God come in human flesh!

This Child, so easily overlooked by Bethlehem, so easily ignored today, brings the wonderful counsel of God's Word, a lamp for our feet, a light for our path. This little One is lying in a manger is very God of very God in whom the fullness of God deigns to dwell.

This Child, born in conflict and rejection, is the Prince of Peace, who came to make peace with his blood, covering our sins, cleansing us, redeeming us. He is our Light and our Life.

"To all who received Him, to all who believed on His name, he gave power to become children of God." Jesus was born of Mary so that we might be born of God. He is received by faith, when we trust that His birth is our birth, that His life is our life, His death on the cross is our death, His rising from the dead is our resurrection, His ascension is our glorification.

To receive Him is to have Him make our hearts His manger. He takes our dead and darkened hearts, and fills them with His light and life. He gives us a new birth by the Holy Spirit whom He sends.

He calls us his sisters and his brothers. He calls his Father "our Father." We are reborn to be like Him in His birth. We are virgin born. Conceived by the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacrament

To receive this Child anew today. We open our hearts to this wonderful Baby born in Bethlehem to save us. Receive His Word, His forgiveness, His body and blood. He will fill our darkness with true light. He will fill us with His life.

**That is deep and lasting Christmas joy.**

**May God grant this to each of us by His Spirit for His Son's sake,**

**Amen.**