

The Wonder of the Light John 1:6-13

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, church. My name is Mason Mileur, and I am a partner here at City Life Church.

In “The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers”, there is a scene near the end where we find our hero Aragorn along with a small army of men and elves defending a fortress called Helm’s Deep. They are surrounded by a vast dark army of orcs led by the evil wizard Saruman. After all hope seems lost, Aragorn begins leading a desperate final charge into the thick of the surrounding army. Then, as the sun just begins to rise, Gandalf the White appears on a hill! Alongside him are a host of cavalry, and they begin a fearless charge down the hillside into the horde below. Just before they meet the dark army of orcs, the light of the sun breaks over the hillside and blinds the orcs who then are trampled by Gandalf’s cavalry. The orcs are scattered. Good triumph over evil. Light over darkness.

While that story from LOTR may be fictional, the story that John tells us is not. Light triumphs over darkness, and its anticipation is what Advent is all about.

Advent invites us every year to ponder the wonder and miracle of the coming Light. “The Light” in this poetic prelude to the Gospel of John refers to Jesus. This concept of light is pregnant with meaning...Why is Jesus called ‘The Light’ in the first place? I believe that John, with an artist’s touch, is crafting a story that sounds almost mythical yet astonishingly is true. Let’s examine 3 aspects of “the light” as we read this story of Christ’s birth. What is the Nature of “the light”, and what is its Purpose? Knowing this, how are we to Respond to “the light”? Nature, Purpose, and Response.

PRAY

NATURE: Eternal and Redemptive

Believe it or not, just as we look forward during Advent to the day that we commemorate Christ's birth, the Jewish people have their own "advent" of sorts as they look forward to the coming of the Messiah. The Old Testament records for us the longings of an entire people as they looked forward to the day the Messiah would come to the world. In a fascinating choice of words, the prophet Isaiah promises that the coming Messiah would be a *light*: (Isaiah 9:2,6) - The people who walked in darkness have seen a great *light*; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has *light* shown. 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. [This means that the story of Jesus doesn't begin with his birth](#)...Isaiah considers Jesus to be the eternal light which he predicted would shine into Bethlehem. What is the nature of the light?--it is [eternal](#); it precedes us. It is also [redemptive](#) light. In Genesis we find a plan to redeem the world from darkness before even Isaiah. God tells the serpent (who embodies the devil): (Gen 3:15) - I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God lovingly responds to the first sin with a promise: foretelling the coming of Jesus who will be bruised for us, but will overwhelm sin with a mortal blow. The story of redemption has been written from the very beginning.

Pause for a moment with me, and take in the wonder of this. We are being told by John that this grand story of redemption by the light did not begin with the birth of Christ. It didn't even begin with Isaiah 700 years earlier. No - this rescue was conceived before creation itself, is promised at the moment that sin entered the world, and is fully realized with the birth of the Light, Jesus. The light is the eternal, redemptive

Jesus. Now, that may be hard to believe. How do we know it's true? We need a witness.

John 1:6-8 - There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

John the Baptist is sent from God to be a witness about the light. Why a witness? Well, a **witness is both vital and humble**. Especially in pre-photograph days, the eyewitness was considered vital in establishing the truthfulness of a claim, but also humble in so far as the eyewitness is not the center of attention. The emphasis is that John isn't the light - he is to testify truthfully to what he has seen and heard...no more and no less. **Is this not comforting?** The weight of expectation for us as a witness is only to obey and to speak truth. The spotlight is not on us, but rather on the Spirit who works in the hearts of men. What God's power can accomplish is beyond what our own power is capable of...we see that God's intention is to rescue all of creation; every man, woman and child. This grand intent is on full display, which says that ALL might believe through John's witness. Now, **belief is kind of a maligned word** these days, isn't it? Oftentimes we take a call to believe as an admission of failure to provide evidence. George Carlin quipped, "Tell people there's an invisible man in the sky who created the universe, and the vast majority will believe you. Tell them the paint is wet, and they have to touch it to be sure." Does belief truly begin where the facts end?

What is interesting about how the apostle John treats this idea of **belief is that he considers it not be a fallback, but rather a relationship**. Pisteuo (pist-yoo'-o) is the Greek word translated as "believe" in our passage. It is also translated to describe the *trust* that God desires from his people. Pisteuo is used almost 100 times in the Gospel of John, more than in any other gospel. **Belief cannot be understood outside of a relationship, where trust in the one in whom you are believing makes**

the ground underneath you solid. Think of it like this: who do you trust, and why? For me, a good example is my wife. I TRUST her because I have given her ample opportunities to stop loving me, yet she continues to love me despite my obvious flaws and selfishness. As a result, I BELIEVE that she loves me, both now and in the future, and we have a stronger relationship. In the same way, God desires that you trust him. He knows you and still loves you, and will never leave you. You won't believe in Him until you trust Him.

Now at Bethlehem the eternal Light becomes flesh. Surely he would come in power and awe, the light to shine forth in the darkness! But no. The Word, who was with God before time existed, all-knowing, all-powerful, and through whom creation happened, took on a limited human nature and frail human body to be born a baby by a woman in a barn. Why did the LIGHT come as a baby instead of an adult? Instead of descending from Heaven in power, he is birthed in weakness. Why? It's all about relationship: In becoming like us, fully human, Jesus shows us that God can be trusted, and believed. Jesus HAD to trust God every step of the way. He depended on God as we depend on God. The wonder and miracle of the Incarnation is that Jesus is fully God AND fully human, and therefore relatable.

PURPOSE: Illumination and Guidance

Jesus is called "the Light". A basic purpose of light is to illuminate something. When something goes bump in the night, we reflexively want to turn the light on. Light helps us to discern the reality of a situation. "Shedding some light" on something means to describe some truth about it. What lights are you using to discern what is true in your life? After all, there are many lights, all promising to illuminate your life and show you the best way to live it. As parents, we may depend on the light of the latest parenting philosophy to guide how we raise our kids. Here in Austin, the tech scene is booming - you may use the light of success to think that your family will understand if you work another

night rather than eat with them at the dinner table. Maybe you are sitting here today thinking about how the holiday season would be brightened by meeting your spouse or getting your dream job. All of these lights claim to be able to illuminate and inform your life of what is “good” or important. However, Jesus is referred to as not just A light, but THE light. Look - [John 1:9 - The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.](#) Do we *really* believe that Jesus is the true light?

All of us have some sort of standard that we use everyday, whether we know it or not, that acts as our guide. We all go walking along our path of life, and when we need direction or information about what is in front of us, or where we should go, we use this light. Jesus comes to us as not just another light, but the TRUE light. His claim is that He is the greatest light we can use to know the reality of our lives! C.S. Lewis wrote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” Do we “see our world” by the light of Jesus? [We are all using some sort of light...it can be anything, really.](#) Take success for example. As parents, we naturally want our kids to succeed. We will use a light of some kind to guide us in defining what success is or isn't. We can choose to use God's light, or our own lesser ones. The light we choose will determine our actions which tell our kids what success is, really. Is putting in the extra study time and getting into the best college as important as knowing God's word? Notice, this is not a “bad” measure of success, but it is not the best. The guiding light we use determines our reality. Are we emphasizing by our actions that the ultimate measure success is a committed life to Christ in the midst of an increasingly hostile culture? Who do we talk to and take counsel from as we make decisions in our life about where to live, what to do, and how to spend our money? We will either be guided by Jesus, the True Light, or some lesser light.

RESPONSE : Reject or Receive

When faced with the “True Light”, Jesus, we must respond in some way. Do we trust Jesus that what he claims about himself is in fact true? Is he God, eternal, the agent by which all of creation came to be, and the source of truth itself? We cannot encounter all of who he is, and walk away undecided. He is absolute Truth, embodied. We must accept him or reject him. There is no middle ground.

Rejection is the willful refusal to accept or believe in someone or something. We see this, as always with John, in terms of a relationship. **John 1:10-11 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.** The Jews are called “his own people”. Embedded within this rejection is pain; that of a parent when a child disowns his family. In terms of the Jews, their rejection of Jesus is not due to a lack of evidence that he is the Messiah. Jesus, as recorded by John and the other apostles, provides sign after sign that he is the Son of God. Rather than receiving Jesus as the Messiah, they chose to embrace their own light: the religion of righteousness through the law. Tellingly, they did not feel as if they really needed Jesus at all. He was a nuisance rather than a Savior. Today, we are the exact same way, aren't we? We reject Jesus because we fail to see a need for God, as we have already embraced our own gods. Sure, they may not be a religion as in the case of the Jews. But our replacement gods are just as pernicious, aren't they? Oftentimes they aren't bad...FOR ME a lesser light that I naturally will follow is leisure. **I am, as my wife loves to say, a “man of convenience”. It's silly, but there are times when I feel entitled to watch Netflix or play video games because I worked hard that day. I will sacrifice time with my family, or God, so that I can relax. Needless to say, this results in “tension” with Christie, and distance from God.** For others, it may be a relationship like a spouse or a child. Whatever it may be, when we follow these “lesser lights” we become smaller, don't we? Movies and books will tell me something about myself and the world

around me, but is it as true and good as what God's light says? The question comes down to which light you trust.

Our text tells us that some do receive Jesus, the True Light. **John 1:12-13** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right 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 of God. John says that these people not only received Jesus, but believed in his name. To believe in Jesus' name STARTS WITH trusting Jesus and believing that the claims he makes about himself are true. It means accepting him to the full extent of his self revelation. It's not enough to believe just that he existed, or that he was a baby in a manger. Just as belief in my wife's claims of love is made possible by my trust of her, belief in Jesus' claims is made possible by our trust in him: that life was created through him (John 1:3) and that true life is found in him (John 1:4). When we trust Jesus, we let his light guide us as we live our life. **The light will permeate into every part of our life if we let it.** When you are tempted to sin, do you allow the lesser light of pleasure lead you to self gratification, or the True Light of Jesus lead you to intimacy with God? As you go to work, do you let the lesser light of ambition or the True Light of Jesus guide your steps? When visiting family this Christmas are we going to view a tough relationship by our own light, or the True Light? This "receiving of Jesus" is not a one-time event but rather a daily one. Every day we decide to receive Jesus or reject him.

CONCLUSION

The true light has come to the world. The *nature* of the light shows us that God can be trusted and believed. The *purpose* of the light is to reveal truth and to guide us. We *respond* to the light by receiving or rejecting it. Jesus, the TRUE LIGHT, does not stand off in the distance beckoning us to come find him. Rather, he seeks us out by arriving on this earth as a person. He understands us not just because he created us but because he became us. This is what Advent anticipates; the

Incarnation of God. Today, we all have a choice - do we let the light of Jesus define and shine through us? If we receive the true light, Jesus, we are told that we are given the right to become children of God. Your Father is seeking you out; trust Him.