

Christmas Eve 2024

Message

John 1:1-14

“The Light Has Come.”

It would be hard to imagine that there could be anyone in Canada, particularly in the town of Simcoe, who doesn't know at least something about Christmas. But imagine, with me, that such a person does exist, and you happen to run into them just before Christmas. Perhaps you learn they are from a foreign country where there are no Christmas celebrations and therefore, they have no idea what all the excitement is about.

Maybe they have lived in isolation their whole lives and have never been exposed to the sights and sounds of the holidays. This imaginary person must feel they have stepped into some strange dream. Everything is so different from what we normally see. People seem to be in such a hurry, heavily laden with bulging shopping bags. They see bright multi-colour lights everywhere they look, hanging from every nook and cranny.

They also have noticed that everyone seems abnormally cheerful, and they greet each other with a smile. Children are very excited, and line up for hours to sit on some red flannel clad portly gentleman at the mall. The music played in shopping centers and on the radio has changed, and everyone is urged by the merchants to get that perfect gift. In their hearts, this person we have thought of must wonder, “What in the world is this all about?” “What's going on here?”

What would you tell them? Where would you start? Would you talk about the decorated Christmas trees? Or would you begin by talking about the tradition of exchanging gifts? Maybe, you even want to tackle the story of Santa Claus and his amazing reindeer? Hopefully, at some point, you might want to share something about the true meaning of Christmas and the birth of Jesus. Again, the question, “Where to start?”

One way to express the true meaning of Christmas is to share that Christmas is a celebration of light coming into the world. It is so obvious a starting point with so many visible expressions of light being used at Christmas time. There are electric lights on Christmas trees, and houses, and on are on every street corner. As a kid growing up, our family sometimes took special trips to view lights at Christmas.

After all, we were only a short drive to Simcoe to see their incredible “Panorama of Lights”. It is our annual display that takes up the whole of the park that winds its way through town. Other signs of light are the candles that many people enjoy burning at this time of year and are also an integral part of our worship, like our Advent wreathes and behold our annual candle extravaganza.

There are also lights that seem to twinkle in people's eyes during this season. We especially see it in the eyes of children as they anticipate Christmas morning, and in the eyes of adults as they remember wonderful Christmases past. The biblical Christmas story is also filled with references to light. The story begins with the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary. Usually when angels appear in the bible, we are told they are surrounded by light and dazzling in appearance.

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Later in the story, we read that after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, shepherds out in the fields see, first one angel, and then a multitude of angels accompanied by bright light. This must have been something to see because we are told the shepherds were watching their flocks by night. Maybe these shepherds also sat by a fire or had torches to chase away predators.

Then of course we have the story in Matthew of the star appearing which guided the magi to come and see Jesus. Do you see this beautiful theme of light running throughout the bible? The very first commandment of God is, "Let there be light". (Genesis 1:3) God later spoke to Moses from a burning bush and commanded Moses to go to Egypt and set God's chosen people free.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God made his presence known through a pillar of fire. God seems to love light, because he told Isaiah the prophet to prophesy these words, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-on them light has shined." (Isaiah 9:2) In Isaiah 60:1 we read, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."

At Christmas then, we celebrate the coming of light into the world just as it was prophesied by Isaiah. In our scripture passage from John we read, "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:4-5) The baby whose birth we celebrate came to bring us all light. Jesus came to light a world filled with darkness.

Christmas also reminds us that there is a light that shines in all of us. This light always burns brighter at Christmas. We are called to be children of light and to let our lights shine.

This baby we celebrate today, grew up and later would teach us, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one, after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on the lampstand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

As we celebrate Christmas Day, we are once again reminded that the "Light" has come. Jesus has come to you and me. Jesus has come to bring light to a world full of darkness. This light shines in all our hearts and it dispels the darkness in our own lives. We may take this light and share it and always remember that the darkness can never overcome it. May all the twinkling lights that we see about us remind us that Christmas is the celebration of the light that has come into the world.