**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 12-24-2023 (PM Christmas Eve Service)
Essentials of the Faith #4 – The God Man Part 2**

There is certainly a beauty about every place on earth in one way or another, but I truly do enjoy the seasons that we experience here in PA. It is a great place to live. The beauty of the snow in winter and the new flowers in the spring, the heat of the green summer and of the low humidity and fall colors of autumn. I enjoy them all. And I am grateful to live in this beautiful part of the country and world. I hope you are as well.

But one thing that I am not as crazy about is the long darkness in the days of late fall and early winter. Certainly, this isn’t just a Pennsylvania thing. Many places around this world have lots of darkness at certain times of the year.

In fact, I found that in one town in Alaska, on the shortest day of the year, sunrise is about 10:30 AM and sunset is around 1:30 PM. Only about 3 hours of sunlight. That is a lot of darkness and I am sure that this would be difficult for many people to deal with, especially when they are not used to it.

If you are like me, you would choose the long days over the long nights. I think most people do as well. I love it when it doesn’t get dark until 9:00PM.

**But while most people prefer the light and would easily choose the days and the light over the night and the darkness, in another sense things are quite the opposite**. You see, in the Bible light and darkness are also very symbolic. Light is connected to transparency and truth and life and health and purity and goodness. Darkness, on the other hand, is often associated with sin and deception and selfishness and hiddenness and evil.

It is a humbling thing to discover that all humanity, including you and me, chose darkness over light. It is but by the grace of God and our response to His grace that we chose spiritual light over darkness.

And so we come to tonight, our Christmas Eve candlelight service. Tonight we are reminded through the physical light of candles that Jesus came to bring spiritual light into a dark world.

Certainly, speaking in the physical, things still became dark after Jesus came to earth. The sun still set when Jesus walked the earth. There were long nights in the late fall and early winter, just as there is today.

Jesus referred to Himself as the light of the world, but that did not mean that the physical things did not change. Jesus wasn’t physically glowing like a light bulb or like Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer. And candles and lamplights were still needed. Even today, flashlights and electricity are used to help see in the dark.

But spiritually, the light of the world did come in the Person of Jesus. And we remember this most clearly at Christmas. Yes, Christmas is often commercialized, but there is a grace and an openness to blessing and giving that God pours out in a special way each year at Christmas. This all comes from the light of Christ that continues to shine brightly today.

Tonight, as we turn to our highlighted Scripture from John’s Gospel, let us consider how people responded to the light of Christ entering the world. This response reminds us that the world needed a savior.

Our passage is from John 3:16-21:

**16For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.**

In these famous and profound words, God is making it very clear that Jesus was sent into the world so that people might be saved and find life in Jesus. Truly, God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but to make a way for the people of the world to be saved, to be rescued.

But rescued from what? Verse 19 makes it pretty clear. Let us hear it again, **“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”** So again, while most people would choose physical light over physical darkness, it is a very different story when it comes to spiritual light and darkness. This is because people love spiritual darkness. From the fall of humanity onward, but by the grace of God, humanity chooses selfishness and sin and doing our own thing. The default is to remain in the dark. Why? Because light bright exposure.

We go on to read in verses 20-21, “**Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”**

It takes courage to come into the light. It takes courage to admit one’s need. I think of the story Beauty and the Beast. At one point, Belle asks the Beast to come into the light. And he musters up the courage to do so, despite his scary appearance.

Friends, Jesus is the light and He invites all people to come into the light. And these verses from John chapter 3 also remind us of how Jesus would make a way for people to come to the light. And this leads to tonight’s essential for the Christian faith, which is belief in the need for the Passion of Jesus Christ.

So far we have highlighted 3 essentials to the Christian faith: The Authority of the Scripture; acknowledging God as our Maker and that we are made in His image, and the unique birth and life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Yes, Jesus came to earth for many reasons. He came to teach and to demonstrate His authority and power in a variety of ways. Yes, He came to perfectly reveal God to humanity. But He also came to offer His life as a sacrifice for all humanity. Jesus became human in order to be humanity’s perfect representative before God and perfect sin sacrifice to God.

The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. All of humanity stood guilty before God, choosing the darkness and rejecting God’s light. But in Jesus, God became human and He chose to take the penalty for sun upon Himself!

Jesus willingly allowed darkness to take His life. He was not a victim. He had the freedom to easily overpower those that sought to destroy Him, but it was only by laying down His life could He make a way to save them and to save everyone.

Scripture tells us that Jesus is our atoning sacrifice. He lived a sinless life and God the Father sees Jesus’ perfect sacrifice as fully sufficient to clean anyone who turns to Jesus and puts their trust in Him as their savior. Only Jesus could do this. He alone was capable of doing it. All of humanity would have their hands dirty because sooner or later they would give in to sin themselves.

But Jesus was not born with a sin nature. Yes, He would be tempted in every way. He was fully human. But because He was also God He had the grace to fully overcome all sin, all temptation.

The sobering truth, friends, is that all humanity was and is in need of a savior. All humanity, even the most godly of people, would choose darkness over light, at least sometimes. And in God’s eyes, all humanity needed God’s grace and mercy. All of humanity needed to reject the darkness and to chose the light.

Although He was fully God, Jesus’ suffering was very real. He sweat drops of blood as He prayerfully awaited His betrayal and impending beating and crucifixion. He was severely flogged to the point of being unrecognizable. He endured the humiliation of being stripped naked and forced to carry a Roman cross to a hill outside the city of Jerusalem. He then experienced the pain of nails being driven through his wrists and ankles.

He endured all this, knowing full well that He could have called down legions of angels to rescue him and to vanquish those that were seeking to kill Him. But the light of His love held Him to that cross, until His body gave out and He died. God truly died for us in the Person of Jesus.

Friends, on this Christmas Eve night, what is the main thing for us to take home with us? And I believe it is this.

**Because of the Passion of Jesus, the God-Man, God has made a way for us to be people of the light**.

As our passage states, **whoever lives by the truth comes into the light**. The truth is that Jesus knows everything about us. He knows our hearts. He knows our sins. He knows us completely. Just as He knew the unspoken words of people around Him during His time on earth, He knows unspoken words as well. We must chose to be courageous and to move into the light.

If you are here tonight and you do not know your sins as being forgiven on account of Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice, God calls you to stand on that truth and put your trust in Jesus as Your all-sufficient Savior. His blood and body given for you were more than enough.

As we chose to live by the truth of Jesus and the truth of the Scripture, we will come into the light. But if you have followed Jesus for some time, please be reminded that we are called to walk in the light and abide in the light of Jesus every day. As Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica, **5You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.**

And friends, we are called not only to come into the light, but also to walk in the light. This world can be a very dark place and temptations about to draw us into the darkness. Our sins are atoned for. Jesus has died for us. And by the power the Holy Spirit we can live in victory over darkness.

The closer we live in the light and walk in the light by standing on the truth of Jesus and His Word and our relationship with Him, the brighter we will shine in this world for Him. At Chestnut Grove Church, we believe our God-given vision is to be a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus. One of the best ways that we strive forward in fulfilling this vision is by choosing every day to live in the light.

So may we always remember the passion of Jesus Christ for us. And may we remember that the story of Jesus does not end with His passion. In fact, in some ways this is only the beginning. In a couple of weeks, as we continue this sermon series, Blain Bargo will highlight the next essential of the Christian faith – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On this Christmas Eve and always, may we remember that we have a living Savior. Our hope is in Him.

Let’s pray…

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<https://vilda.alaska.edu/digital/collection/cdmg11/id/10871/>