

THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS



Luke 1:26-38

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- A. The Creation Lights
- B. The Salvation Lights

Christmas is such a wonderful time of the year. One of the things I like most at Christmas time is the lights that are carefully put around the houses and other objects. During the day, one is hardly aware of their present. But at night, the streets and houses are brought to life. Pittsburgh has a tall and well-lit Christmas tree at the center of the city. True, the world has stripped Christ from Christmas but not completely. The schools might not allow one to teach about Jesus Christ, but their schedules and days of the year are forcibly orientated around the birth of Christ. What year will it soon be? Why? Because the yearly markings separates the time before Christ (b.c.) and after Christ (a.d. Literally from the Latin *ano domini* - the year of the Lord).

And so in the same way, it is next to impossible to strip Christ from Christmas. The nights are too dark, the days are too short to take away the Light that radiates hope and love. The world might say “No” to putting up a manger, but they have a very difficult time saying “No” to the gifts of love, joy, hope and light that the Christ child introduced into this world. They still know there is something true, beautiful and glorious about lights in the dark. They have a difficult time rejecting these glorious things once exposed to them. These lights in the night well summarize the story of Christmas for Christ is the Light of Christmas.

Today I will speak about two important kinds of light that we often do not think about.

A. Creation Lights

The first kind of lights are the creation lights. In Genesis 1:14 “God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.”

If we look carefully at this verse, we would discover that the creation of the sun, moon and stars were not just for light and time. We are familiar with how the sun, moon and stars are indeed shining their light and warmth to us on earth.

We can also easily see how they form the basis of time: daytime and nighttime. But they also served as signs. The above verse says, “and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.” The first thing mentioned is the signs. Clearly God did not make a mistake. You might ask, “Signs of what?” This is a good question.

The lighted objects in the heavens have all been carefully crafted; they have not come about by accident. And if by design, then we should not be surprised at the thought that the most eventful times on earth are heralded by the creation that the Lord designed and made. We do find many extraordinary events occurring on the earth at the time of Jesus’ birth. Mary was miraculously overshadowed by the Holy Spirit so she came to be with child. A decree went out from Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, demanding that all the people to return to their native homes to pay taxes. He didn’t realize how he was help fulfilling the scripture written at least 400 years before from Micah 5:2.

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”

So in obedience to the decree Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem. By God’s wonderful design the promised baby came just as they reached there. And there were many other special events occurring such as angels speaking and announcing great things of the baby who would be born as King.

If we find these extraordinary events occurring on the earth, then we should not at all be surprised to find that these events were also marked in the heavens. Perhaps it is the special star that this sign refers to. Matthew 2:1-2 says,

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.”

Some have suggested that this star was a rare alignment of stars signaling the birth of a king; others believe there was a specially created star or comet. This star was not a quick appearance but lasted over a long period so to allow these students of the skies to observe the star, plan to leave on a long trip and finally arrive. The point is that the star was a very significant sign to these wise men. They understood it and so traveled a dangerous and unknown road, invest much money in their gifts and worship this One - all for a baby!

This is not the only sign of the heavens. That sign appeared once. But every year at Christmas there is a phenomena in the skies reminding us again of the Lord’s birth. Is it then any surprise that during the shortest and darkest days of the year in December, that Jesus Christ, the Light of the world came into the world as a baby. The birth in a remote town called Bethlehem, by a poor and unknown couple, seemed to be so incidental, even accidental. And yet the world was convoluting around this birth. The stars were shaped. The season was prepared. The emperor was moved. The wise men were commissioned. The angels were called. We shouldn’t be surprised that the whole creation including the sun, moon and stars responded to the glorious plans of God.

If we deny the importance of the birth of Jesus Christ, then we deny the importance of His death. If we think Christ’s first coming as insignificant, then we will think His second coming as trivial. Our family went to what seems to be our city’s traditional Christmas event. We drove through this park named Hartwood Acres. There in the dark woods, we could easily see the beginning of the fun trail of lights. In the deep night the beauty and glory of the many many lights all very clearly and cleverly illustrating different scenes. There were trees lit up; stars hanging from the sky. There was even a fire truck putting out the flame of a dragon. Truly spectacular but truly sad.

I don’t think I was ever so disappointed during Christmas season as when I pulled through the exit and thought that the Light of Christmas was never displayed. In the millions of lights, there was no reminder of the birth of Jesus Christ. There was no slight hint that the reason we celebrate by having these lights and Christmas is because God sent His Son into the world.

This is not because we are ignorant of His coming. Not in America. Not in our city. People know Jesus Christ is the reason for Christmas. But people willingly put Him out of Christmas. It perhaps is a philosophical abortion. Jesus Christ is carefully deleted from Christmas. I reflected that it would have been much better to have one candle and read a verse from the Holy Book about the birth of Jesus than to look at a million sterile lights without any due respect to the designer of Christmas.

You see our world is a very dark place. When we assemble the lights the way we want, we string them up representing all the things that we think are important. We have birthday candles. Surely we are important! Our life began. We have lights to keep us working at night on

our projects. We have lights to shine on the roads so we can travel with ease, safety and speed. We try to fight the lights of creation so to hide its real purpose and meaning. But the lights of the world continually force us to revolve our lives around them. Students try to break this momentum by their all nighters but soon they are forced back into the day routine. Jesus is the true Light which we cannot do without. Once we have been exposed to the joy and glory of lights in the darkness, we can not easily do without them.

B. Salvation Lights

We do not only have creation lights, but we also have salvation lights. Creation lights provide a strong reminder at the Savior. Salvation lights shine a clear message to our lives about this Savior. Christmas is not a tame story. One of the most powerful movements in creation occurred at the moment of Christ's birth. Let the shepherds tell the story from Luke 2:8-14,

"And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

Did you note that while the shepherds were in the fields at night, a most powerful and glorious light shone. It was the glory of the Lord that shone around them. And they heard that wonderful and long anticipated message, "I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, prophesied of John the Baptist and Jesus saying in Luke 1:76-79,

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

Did you catch those words describing Jesus Christ? The visitation of the "Sunrise from on high." What is it like before the sun rises? It is dark. We just can't see. But something happens when the sun begins to rise. The skies first begin to lighten. The birds begin to sing. Everything begins to awaken to the light that begins to shine. I remember several times in my life going to the shore and waiting for the sunrise observing this process. But this is only the precursor to the real rising of the sun. For early on, we only have indirect light. We might have mountains blocking our view as where I live, but it is only a little while before the sun rises above everything to cast its strong penetrating, life giving light upon all. Listen again to these prophetic words of Christ's birth, "the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, to guide our feet into the way of peace." We notice the Sunrise from on High shines in two places: to those sitting in darkness and to those sitting in the shadow of death.

Let's first think about our world sitting in darkness. In our modern world we have somewhat escaped the daily gospel message in the creation. The darkness doesn't hold its same terror as it has in the past. Before the time of electricity and batteries, this message was overwhelming. We find first of all that the world was in darkness. There was no light. There was the severely

crippling affect of darkness. Let's turn to Exodus 10:21-23 to see what it was like without light. God turned the lights off on the Egyptians during one plague.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings."

Why is it that no one could see each other? Why didn't anyone get up? The darkness had a paralyzing affect on the Egyptians. The Egyptians worshipped the sun, but God showed the foolishness of worshiping the sun. There was light where the Israelites lived though. They could walk around and experience the fullness of life because God provided the light needed as He does each day.

The Lord is trying to tell the world with each physical sunrise that we are a severely limited people. Without Him sending the light, there would be no light. Without Him saying, "Let there be light," there would be no light. In the same way without Him sending His Son, the Light of the World, the world would have but darkness. This is the irony of have acres of lights without any mention of the Light-giver. For many people who ride about in their cars looking at the lights will suddenly be greatly shocked for the artificial lights will go out. And there will only be darkness. Nothing will illuminate the world except Jesus. But then it will be too late.

What about the world sitting in the shadow of death? Death is even darker than darkness. We don't often think about it, but how long would you live if the sun did not come up. Don't mention the trivial aspects of the upsetting wind patterns if there be no sun. Just think more simply at what would happen. We would begin to wilt. Many of us perhaps have seen or observed what happens to plants when put in a dark room. They die. There is no hope for them. I think like these Egyptians, we would also begin to wilt and die. The world without Christ is sitting in the shadow of death. Maybe the reason we sleep is to remind us in the darkness how close to death we all lay. We are like dead bodies wilting away. But something happens when the light comes. We awaken with the world.

This is the reason Christmas is so important. Christmas is not just the birth of a baby. Christmas is the entrance of light -of The Light. The sunrise from on High came. And He shines on mankind. He came at the darkest time of the year to bring the Light that would never be put out. Isaiah 9:1-2 says this.

"But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them."

Application

What about us? Have we been trying to get as much light as possible but excluding the source of light - the Son of God? Have we used electricity, mirrors, candles, fire etc. to duplicate what only the Real Source of life can provide. Buddhism is not that light. Christmas materialism is not that source of light and life. The evil one is planting more and more lights around to distract us. But these lights don't mean anything without Jesus Christ. Sparkle Season is empty without Christ. And so are your lives, dark and void of real light, if indeed you do not know Christ. Jesus Christ wants to bring this life and light to you today.

You might not be a Christian at all. But you have darkness. The Lord, the Sunshine on High, wants to show His light into your soul today. You might be a backslidden Christian. Now is the time to let His real light and life come back to your life.

Never allow a materialistic Christmas rule Christ out. Today we as God's people must assert that Jesus alone is Lord. Lights are nice but can be done without. But we must never shut out the true Light of God. We are tired of having all the packaging of Christmas but not finding the light and life of Christmas.

Communion Meditation

Did you know what other sign the Lord performed when Jesus came the first time to the earth? Some people question whether Christmas was truly in December. But we should not go counter to tradition without reason and fact.

For as we look at the facts we find that lambs are born at the early part of December onwards. Their mating season is in June and have a five month gestation period.

The shepherds were out watching the sheep because they the baby lambs were being born at that time. If they did not come to quick assistance, the little lambs would be either hurt by predators or by the cold.

In the same way, God sent His only Son into the world to be the Savior. Jesus was the true Lamb of God. "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NASB).

It was only fit and right that the Lamb of God was born at the time other lambs were being born. It was only fit that the Light of the World would be born at the darkest time of the year. For from that point onward, the world would only get lighter.