

## **Christmas Light**

Reader: *"the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."* Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4 v 16

Leader: First there was the star. We call the men who realized its significance 'wise', and so they were. Not because they saw the star, many others saw it too, but because they realized its significance, and decided that it was worth leaving everything and traveling to a far off land to meet the one whose birth was proclaimed in the heavens.

Reader: Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sharing your work in the world with us. We ask for your wisdom, for us not just to see, but to recognize the signs of your work, and we ask you to give us the strength and the determination to act on your guidance. Amen.

Carol: We Three Kings

Leader: The light of God's glory came closer to earth. Shepherds working in Bethlehem's fields were amazed to see angels singing God's praises. They also left their sheep and went to see for themselves the child whose birth produced these amazing events.

Reader: Luke 2: 8-18

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Prayer: Almighty God, your glory terrified the shepherds when they saw it, but your message to them was one of hope. A savior had been born and he was the means of creating peace between men and women and you, their creator. Thank you for sending Jesus to do what we were powerless to do, to save us from the penalty for our sins. Please give us the courage and the enthusiasm of the shepherds, to tell others this incredible Good News.

Carol While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night.

Reader: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Leader: And so Jesus, the Light of the World, came and lived as a man on the earth he had created. Although people realised he was different, they didn't recognise his deity. Even his closest disciples didn't understand his mission until the indwelling Holy Spirit made it clear to them. He came to the Jews, God's chosen people, but they rejected and crucified him. But that message of hope that the angels had given the shepherds wasn't lost. Because to all who received him and believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus, for bringing your light into the world. Even today many reject you, but we know you and we have the testimony of those who saw your glory. Thank you for your grace and truth, thank you for taking away our sins and giving us the right to become Children of God. We look forward with anticipation to the time when we will also so your glory, as you sit at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Amen

Reader: John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."

Ephesians 5:8-10

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

### Reflection

Formless, empty and engulfed in darkness, that was the state of our world until God spoke. “*Let there be light*”, the first word of God recorded in the Bible, achieved God’s purpose of bringing light and life to his creation.

From the very beginning God declared that light was good.

The New Testament expands our understanding of light. **1 John 1** reveals that God is not only the author of light, he IS light. In his act of creation, God has drawn from his own nature. “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*” (**1 John 1:5**).

Darkness, the original state of the universe before God’s intervention, remains the universal symbol and condition of sin and death; light is the symbol and expression of holiness and the presence of God.

Light brings life and life in turn produces light. This is what John tells us in the first chapter of his gospel, as he introduces us to Jesus, the Word of God. “*In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity*”. (**John 1:4**)

When Jesus spoke about light, he didn’t say he had brought light, he said that he IS light (**John 8:12, 9:5**). By coming to earth, Jesus revealed God in a way he had never been seen before. He also revealed the way God’s plan for his people had been distorted and twisted, so that the leaders of the Jews were leading the people away from God. These leaders were spiritually blind, and because of that, they didn’t recognise who Jesus was.

People today are spiritually blind as well, when they reject Jesus as God and choose to live life the way they want, rather than the way God directs. God our creator sees the *big picture* of life on earth; we see just a small part of it, as though we were walking through the darkness with a candle to light our path. Jesus has replaced the candle with a searchlight, but many people don’t want to come into his light because they don’t want their actions to be seen.

Spiritual blindness can be cured by the presence of the Holy Spirit, indwelling directing and guiding, and we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe that Jesus is God and accept him as our Saviour and the Lord of our lives. (**John 1: 12**)

All those who do catch and reflect the light of God and of Christ are called *lights*. Christians have been called out of the darkness we lived in before we knew Jesus, and are now called “*children of light*” (**John 12:36, Ephesians 5:8**). But as followers of Jesus we are to live our lives in line with our calling which is to find out what pleases the Lord (**Ephesians 5:10**).

God has a purpose in calling us to follow Jesus. Our purpose is to bring glory to God in heaven, and we are to do this by reflecting God’s light in our own lives, so others will see what we do and be directed to the one who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

**1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Carol O Little Town of Bethlehem

Leader: Jesus has given us a purpose and a responsibility to reflect his light so others will be drawn to him, but we can only do this if we are prepared to live ‘as children of the light’.

Reader: 1 John 1:5-9

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 2:7-11

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

Leader: We are saved by grace through faith, as Ephesians 2:8 tells us, and that is God's gift to us, but we will be known by the way we act. Particularly by the way we act to other Christians. Jesus told us that everyone will know that we are his disciples, if we love one another. We cannot be reflectors of Jesus' light if we fail to love our Christian brothers and sisters. Who do you need to forgive this Christmas? Who do you need to help and support? Whose forgiveness or help and support do you need to accept?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we want to reflect your light and love to others, at all times, but we so quickly become dirty, cloudy reflectors. Please help us to keep close to you, and to love others, not with our own weak and wavering love, but with your great love that saw us, unlovable as we were, and died in our place. Amen.

Song Brother, Sister, let me serve you.

The Grace: May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen

Prepared by Wendy Mayer © 2012

