

The Light of Christmas

The Christmas Gift—part 1

December 1, 2019

Secular Christmas shares some of the same pageantry as Christian Christmas. One of those things is the explosion of lights in the darkness: the White House Christmas tree, the Christmas tree at Fashion Island, the Newport Beach boat parade, cozy fires in the hearth, your home Christmas tree, the decorating of the house with lights outside and candles inside.

This imagery of light is rich for the Christian. The Christian concept of light signifies hope when things are dark, and The Light Himself, Jesus Christ who came to a dark world to deal with the darkness of human nature. We remember this with the Advent candles.

DAY 1: The darkness of the world.

Isaiah 9:1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan--

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

1. The bible uses darkness as an important metaphor to illustrate two awful realities: (1) evil, and (2) ignorance.

2. The kind of ignorance the bible talks about is willful ignorance, a refusal to humble ourselves and learn about the wonder of who God is and what He requires of us.

3. Examples abound all around. Saji John leads a ministry in India, rescuing young girls and women from the sex slave trade.

4. It's easy to point at the evil "out there," in the world. It's a completely different thing to see the evil in ourselves.

5. A husband I know sees nothing wrong with going to the strip club. Journalists see no problem with writing their "news" stories to fit the narrative of their own worldview and values. Politicians see no problem with hammering on the opposite party while being completely blind, not only to their own party but to themselves when they do the same thing.

6. Human darkness, both our willful ignorance of God and the "everyday evil" that ensues will not be stopped by human solutions. Only divine intervention can arrest the darkness that lies in every human heart.

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 2: How darkness works; what darkness brings...

1. How darkness works:

The context for yesterday's verses, Isaiah 9:1-2 comes from what preceded those verses:

Isaiah 8:19 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

a. When mankind or a single person encounters a problem they “naturally” turn either inward to themselves or outward to the “experts.” How is this seen in Isaiah 8:19?

b. What is Isaiah's take on their approach? (v. 19)

c. What should the people have done? (Isaiah 8:20)

2. What darkness brings...

Isaiah 8:21 Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.

Isaiah 8:22 Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

a. Darkness has a downward spiral to it. In verses 19-20, we saw that man looks for human solutions, either inside himself or through the “experts.” His assumption is that man has the intellect and moral compass to see his way through to solutions. He neglects to humble himself and seek God and God's wisdom.

b. The results are depicted in Isaiah 8:21-22. Jot down what strikes you about each downward step in the downward spiral. The steps are depicted in physical terms, but these are allegorical in nature, depicting the downward spiral in the human heart!

1) “Distressed and hungry” –

2) “...they will roam through the land” –

3) “When they are famished...” -

4) “enraged” –

5) “...curse their God and king” -

4. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: Light brings life, truth, and joy.

*Isaiah 8:19 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, **they have no light of dawn.***

1. Isaiah uses the sun as a metaphor to illustrate how light operates, and what light does.

2. When our relationship with God is weak, spiritual darkness gains traction. What can ensue? Depression, discouragement, fear, insecurity, loneliness, broken relationships, etc.

3. Just like the physical sun illuminates the truth of our surroundings, spiritual light gives spiritual life.

*1 John 1:5 (RSV) This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is light and in him is no darkness at all.***

*⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him **while we walk in darkness**, we lie and do not live according to the truth;*

*⁷ 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 cleanses us from all sin.*

4. What happens when we walk in spiritual darkness?

5. What can happen when we walk in the light of God's truth?

6. With spiritual light we gain wisdom, the ability to see accurately who God is, who we are, how relationships work, what needs we have and how those needs can be met in God.

7. Joy is enhanced by our relationship with God. Even when we seem to be enjoying someone or something else, the joy that we sense is partly the unrecognized realization that God is the author of all that we enjoy!

*James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from **the Father of the heavenly lights**, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: The attributes of God, our Savior.

*Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called **Wonderful Counselor**, **Mighty God**, **Everlasting Father**, **Prince of Peace**.*

1. But God did not just stay aloof, or leave us in our sinful condition, unable to rectify what's wrong inside of us.

2. He came to earth as a little baby. He entered our sometimes cruel and heartless world, and was treated cruelly and heartlessly! Why?

3. We discover that the baby born is not just a human, or even a very special human. The child that is born is none other than God in the flesh! This truth is driven home by four remarkable titles that are attributed to deity!

4. How would being a Wonderful Counselor help us?

5. How would Jesus being a Mighty God make a difference for us?

6. How would God being an Everlasting Father strike you?

7. How could the Prince of Peace help us?

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: A child is born, a son is given...

Isaiah 9:6 For to us **a child is born**, to us **a son is given**, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

1. The incarnation (God becoming flesh) is most simply depicted in eight words!

“...a child is born, a son is given...”

2. The baby born at Bethlehem was born like any other baby. What strikes you about newborn babies?

3. For all the humanity of the baby born at Bethlehem, Isaiah adds another astounding attribute to that baby—divinity!

a. In contrast to “a child is born” Isaiah records that “*a son is given*.”

b. That baby “son” was none other than the Son of God.

*John 1:14 (RSV) And the Word **became flesh** and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of **the only Son from the Father**.*

*John 1:18 (RSV) No one has ever seen God; **the only Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*

c. That son was given by whom and for whom?

d. The divinity of the baby is hammered home by the four titles of divinity that are attributed to God alone! Look back at Isaiah 9:6)

4. What strikes you from today’s devotional?