

The Light of Christmas:

Today is the 2nd sermon in our Advent Sermon Series, The Light of Christmas. I hope this series will help you get a fresh perspective on Christmas. I really do love the Christmas season, this is the most wonderful time of the year.

The family gatherings, the food, the music, etc. But some aspects of the season are challenging and even painful. My family of origin is complicated, uncomfortable and a bit dysfunctional. For me growing up, I remember holidays as usually filled with anger and yelling. As I grew up, I started to learn that was because my mom grew up in a very complicated, uncomfortable and dysfunctional family!

But I'm not alone! For many people, it is also a time of year cause; or at least raises to the surface, tensions in relationships, unmet expectations. Some of it coming from the family they grew up in; and now with COVID or sickness or family moving away or whatever the case may be - there's pain of absent loved ones.

Let's be honest, for many people, at Christmas, we're faced with problems we can't fix, people we can't control, expectations we can't meet, and with our country being so polarized in politics and other sociological issues, it's even harder to talk at some family gatherings.

Then as we grow as Christians, we start to learn that:

- I'm a problem I can't solve.
- I'm the person I can't seem to control.
- I set expectations others can't meet.

1. So... what do you do when the magic, and wonder of Christmas feels unobtainable? How can we reconnect with the reason of the season?
 - **It starts with remembering, despite all the drama and hurt feelings, past or present... Christmas is still the most wonderful time of the year. But not because of what's happening . . .**
2. Regardless of what's going on with you and your family... or lack of family, **this is the most wonderful time of the year.**

- Because, unlike Easter, where we pause for a day to reflect on **the most wonderful event in history**, at Christmas our thoughts are aimed for a month at the event that stands at the center of history.

This event has the power to move into our spirit and re-center our lives. Christmas is a powerful time that can create new narratives for our lives.

3. The fact that your Christmas is not what it could be or should be... and that you can't fix it... that is actually **the reason** God sent his Son into this world.

Christmas is not the most wonderful time of the year because of what friend or family member is with us . . . but Christmas reminds us - who is for us.

The darker and more complicated things get, and at Christmas time stress gets magnified, during Christmas we are reminded that Jesus came to make an extraordinary change in our lives.

Let's start at the beginning

- A. You probably know, there are 4 Gospels or accounts of Jesus life in the beginning of the New Testament. Matthew, Mark and Luke are very similar, but the 4th - the Gospel of John, is very different and is believed to be **written many years after the other Gospels**. John, who was an old man when he wrote this Gospel, if you read the New Testament, you'll see that he frequently was talking about his time with Jesus!

Why not, he was an eye witness! But instead of writing another account of Jesus' life for future generations, he did realize he needed to write what he had seen differently from the other Gospels.

- John didn't begin with the story of Jesus' birth narrative.
 - John also deduced the description of God down to – God is love!
1. John described God as love because of all that He had seen and experienced.
 2. He stood with his arm around Mary, and Jesus told John that Mary was now his mother and John was now Mary's son. Then John was his friend bleed to death.

3. John lost all of what he had. He lost friends and family members, he pretty much lost his society and culture. But he saw Jesus as a light in a very dark world!

B. So John began his Gospel by **describing** the **implications** and **significance** of Jesus' birth. He tells us why Jesus' birth is the most wonderful, significant time of year for all humanity!

C. John had seen so much darkness in his life!

1. John has seen or heard of all of the other Apostles, his friends had been killed and martyred.
2. He saw how the Romans had cruelly and violently built their empire and made anyone who challenged them a slave.
3. The Jews lived under a crazy emperor who launched the legions on Judea and Jerusalem. John saw and survived the horror of the Roman legions' march through Galilee.
4. He saw Jewish zealots hold up in the city of Jerusalem and when the Romans couldn't breach the city walls, the Roman army trapped the Jewish people in Jerusalem.
5. Any anyone who tried to escape the city and was captured, was crucified. At one time, there were as many as 500 crucifixions a day.
6. So the people of Jerusalem trapped in the city and starved. Then they experienced horrible diseases that went with the mass deaths.

We can't imagine what John saw and experienced!

7. In August of AD 70, the Romans finally broke the city walls and historians state that over a 1,000,000 people were killed during the siege. 97,000 were captured and enslaved.
8. Then the Romans destroyed the temple and that was the end of the end of Old Testament Judaism.
9. John lost his friends and his family, his culture and his country.

D. **It was a dark time for Israel and his people and the world never saw it darker. And still, John believed.** In fact, at the end of his gospel, he tells us the reason why he write the Gospel.

John 20:30–31 “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Life, not physical life, but another more real eternal life!

E. As he sat to write in these darkest of dark times, John remembered that when the story of Jesus began, it was dark then as well.

1. Herod the Great ruled as a Roman puppet king, a madman who murdered his family members and anyone else who threatened his power.
2. Herod sent his henchmen into Bethlehem and the area around it to kill baby boys two years old and under.
3. But then another Roman butcher – Pilate had Jesus’ executed – after he confessed that he couldn’t find a reason to charge Jesus.
4. So, John skipped the baby story and went straight to the heart of the message. He described everything based on what he had seen and heard:

John 1:4–5

Verse 4: In him was life . . .

- In Greek it is literally: “**In him, life was.**”
- Not life like everyone has life. John said there was a different life available. A bigger, better, uncontainable, indescribable and victorious life. In a dark world characterized by death, in him John saw life.

4 . . . and that life was the light of all mankind.

- In that newborn baby, and in Jesus - the man, something was so powerful that it broke through even the darkness of injustice and corruption.
- John was saying that his friend Jesus brought something for everybody. And wasn’t just for Jews . . . and it wasn’t just for a region or Jewish nation . . . Jesus wasn’t the light of the Jews. He was the Light of the World.
- And then John made one of the most remarkable statements in the New Testament . . .

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

II. John's Conclusion

A. Despite all John had seen and all he had lost; then he realized that the darkness of the world could not put out this light.

1. Caesar **Augustus**, who ruled the year Jesus was born, was dead, his legacy limited to a dying empire.
2. **Tiberius**, who ruled when Jesus was crucified, he abandoned his role as an emperor, became a paranoid recluse and died like a common criminal.
3. **Nero**, who tried to destroy the early church, committed suicide after the Roman Senate declared him a public enemy.
4. The temple had been destroyed.
5. **The world was in chaos, but the darkness couldn't put out this light!**

B. But John knew, even as an old man and coming to the end of his life... this life that began in a manger was the life that would serve as the light of all humanity. **In the end, no matter how extreme the fear, no matter how deep the anxiety or depression, there is a LIGHT that shines in the darkness and that light brings a LIFE would win the day.**

So, at Christmas . . .

- When we experience the complications and the unmet expectations . . .
- As we miss loved ones . . .
- As we're reminded of the darkness . . .
- As we are reminded that there are some things we'll never get . . .

We're also reminded that there is life and light that penetrates the darkest of the darkness. Jesus is life and light that overcomes the dark.

1. We celebrate God's sending a light that is life that penetrates even the darkest darkness.

2. And it is there that we find our hope.

3. What makes this the **most** wonderful time of the year is not necessarily what's **happening**, **but what happened** when God sent Jesus into this dark world.

John 1:4–5 “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Communion and prayer