John 1:6-9

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Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0:00] Well, again, a warm welcome to St. John's, if you've come in since the announcements. We are in this season of Advent. You can see here we're into the third Sunday.

And during Advent, we have been going through a sermon series in John 1. And we've seen, first of all, that Jesus is the Word, God expressing himself perfectly in Jesus.
And secondly, last week we heard that Jesus is the life of the world as well. That he gives physical life and spiritual life.
And then today we see that Jesus is the light. And this is a theme throughout John. Even Jesus, Jesus himself will say very clearly, I am the light of the world.
And you know, we've been talking a lot about Christmas already. This week, all these events we're having. And Christmas is on the shortest day of the year, almost.
[1:01] And it's chosen because we are, that time of year, because we are seeing light coming in the midst of great darkness. That is the theme of our little passage that we heard today.

Light is something that we appreciate deeply. Especially, I think, here in Vancouver. On sunny days, the mood of this city changes.
I don't know if you noticed that. People seem to be much more upbeat. They have a rosy outlook in life. And I particularly noticed it this week, during our two days of sun, after all our rain.
The city was in a better mood. Isn't it amazing, people would say, to see the sun? We don't take it for granted here in Vancouver. Now, this may have been the reason why, because of all our darkness, that Nicholas and I, when we were walking the dog together, were having a conversation.
And Nicholas said, I wonder what it would be like if we didn't even have a sun. What it would be like not to have the sun. And so we talked about what would happen to the earth if that were the case.
And I decided, I'll check this out on the internet as well.
[2:12] So I looked it up. What it would be like if the sun was snuffed out. You'll be very pleased to know that it won't happen immediately. It's impossible. But if it were to happen, suddenly there would be, without sunlight, no photosynthesis.

So the process by which all plants generate food would be over. It would stop the second the sun stopped shining. But the worst part of it is that the earth's average temperature would, at the end of the day, drop down to about zero degrees.
Sorry, after the first week. And then by the end of the first year, it doesn't happen right away, which was interesting. It'll go down to about 80 below Celsius for the average temperature.
And then after a number of years, it would settle at about 129 below. So, of course, earth's oceans would all freeze over. And the earth would be transformed into a dark, lifeless, cold world.
Now, John has been making this extraordinary claim in John 1 that the physical universe, including the sun, comes into being through Jesus.
[3:22] It is the reason. He is the reason why we have a beautiful, warm, complex, interconnected, and really bountiful life here on earth.

He sustains it and directs it all every day. If you take God out of the picture, you have to say that nature, with a capital N, is responsible for the direction of creation.
And why things develop and why everything is so complex. That is a very unsatisfactory answer when you think about it. Something vague like nature, with a capital N.
And you know, in this reading, there's an even bigger claim that is being made about Jesus. And it is saying this, that without Jesus, every one of us are spiritually like the earth without the sun.
That spiritually we are dark, lifeless, and cold towards God. Our relationship with the living God is in darkness.

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[4:32] And that's why verses 5 through 9 are such good news for us. It is saying that Jesus is the true light that has come into the world to give us a vital, flourishing life with God.

And in this little passage, there are three ways that we are taught that that light comes into our life. In verse 5, it talks about an invasion.
And then in verses 6 through 8, it talks about a witness. And in the last verse 9, it speaks about an invitation. All of it is life-changing.
And I hope you'll turn your Bible to John 1, 5 through 9. And I want to go through this briefly. I'm going to start reading at the beginning of verse 4, which is our last week's verse.
It says this, You see what this is saying here?
[5:41] That the world is by nature dark in their relationship with their creator. Many don't know the God who created them. They don't know they are separated from the living God, that they are spiritually dead.

Or they live as though God does not exist. This is much of our world. And you know, one of the most famous prophecies of Jesus came from Isaiah 9, written hundreds of years before Jesus.
It is about him. And it is featured in Handel's Messiah. And I hope you'll listen for the words when you hear it played this Advent.
Because one of the movements says this. It's from right out of Isaiah 9. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.
See, Isaiah is saying that people can actively walk and dwell. You can live your life out. But you are in deep spiritual darkness.
[6:50] That's the prophecy. It's a picture of humanity without Jesus. It is a busy life, going about your business. But actually being dead spiritually inside.

It is a deep, impenetrable darkness, according to Isaiah. Unless God does something. And that's the beauty of that verse. He does it.
Very, very powerfully. The beautiful hope of verse 5 is that God shines his light into the darkness. It is an invasion of hope.
A beautiful invasion. In his great love for the world, God becomes man in Jesus. This is the great miracle of Advent and Christmas, of the Bible.
He has entered our darkness, filling it with light. Now the question that you're going to ask is, well, what is light? And if you're a scientist, you're going to say, well, light is about energy.
[7:52] It is the power that we have from light. For the philosopher, it is about wisdom. You know, illumination, the search for truth. And for the religious person, it is about purity and perfection.

How can I make myself acceptable to God? Now Jesus fulfills all these definitions of light. By the power of the resurrection, Jesus imparts energy beyond what we can imagine.
It is eternal life with him. He makes us alive to God. Imagine that. By the power of his death and resurrection, we have a new life that has God in the center of it.
He, by his power, brings us into that by something called adoption into a family. And then Jesus' words are truth.
It is perfect wisdom. Why? Because he comes from heaven. He created all things. We can know God and come to the Father through him.
[9:03] There is perfect wisdom. And then finally, Jesus lives the perfect life, the pure life in our place. All that Jesus said, all that he does in his life are completely in step with the Father.

All that I do, the Father asked me to do, he says. And we see the love and the mercy and the beauty of God in Jesus. That's why Colossians will say that in Jesus is the perfect image of God.
The glory of God is in the face of Jesus. And this light has come. It has invaded. And why is it invaded? It is a wake-up call for us.
We are encountering God's unimaginable love for us, telling us there is true hope. Finally, there it is.
Some of you may know who Rico Tice is.
He's the one who created Christianity Explored, which our church is going to offer, that really helps people to explore who Jesus is for the first time. And he wrote a post this week that said this.
[10:14] He said, sometimes in Scripture, coming to faith is described as waking up, which is what light does. And I think that this is what has happened in the past two years.

A lot of people have woken up to the reality of death. And he went on to say that many during the pandemic will have lost someone or known someone who has lost someone.

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And it now becomes acceptable to ask our friends, Are you in a story that gives you hope in the face of death? That's a great question.
Are you in a story that gives you hope in the face of death? Because that question leads us to Jesus. Jesus invades the world as the author of your story.
Your creator, with your well-being, has that as his first priority overall. Your well-being.
[11:12] And the question for you is, will you let him write your story? Will you let him write a story that has an ending, that is all about certain hope?

That is the wake-up call of this passage. And the thing that comes to us is that, okay, we are in darkness. What does the darkness think of this light?
What does it think about this invasion that God is making? Well, in verse 5 it says, The darkness does not overcome the light. And that word overcome has a double meaning.
And it's a great word, and it's hard to translate. That's why the older versions have a different translation. But it actually helps us to think more deeply about Jesus.
It can have this hostile sense that you see in the English here. Meaning that the darkness seeks to snuff out the light. The world is threatened by Jesus.
[12:12] Because he is a savior, that means that we need to be rescued. That's the implication. If he is the creator, it means that he is in charge.

That he has a right to our life. If he died for our forgiveness, then we are people who must sin. We have sin that has to be forgiven. And if he rises from the dead to give eternal life with him, we must be dead without his resurrection.
And you see, the darkness of human pride struggles with this. It wants to keep that light under wraps. Pride in the world says, don't impose your truth on me.
And this happened to Jesus himself. Jesus was rejected by his own people, as you can see down in verse 11. And certainly the world may ridicule you if you say you've been to church or you've been exploring Christianity.
You don't believe that stuff, do you? There's many forces today that want to extinguish the light of Jesus. His claims are too great. The invasion is threatening.
[13:22] But verse 5 says the darkness will never be able to extinguish the light. And this has proven to be true ever since Jesus came. Now there's a second part to that meaning as well.

And that is it has been translated that the darkness doesn't apprehend or understand the light of Jesus. And that may be your experience. John knows this as he's writing it.
It's hard to accept and understand that the God of all power, who's far greater than the universe that he created, would plan for your eternal well-being.
That he would write a story for you. How can I matter so much to God? And that is why the light can be hard to comprehend when it comes.
That's why Paul prays in Ephesians 3.18. He prays that you may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge.
[14:29] Very hard to understand. God help us to understand. The world needs that help. The help to receive the light. And therefore, God does the second thing.

And that is he sends a witness. Look at verses 6 through 8. There was a man, it says, sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.
He was not the light, but he came to bear witness to the light. You see, in his love, God knew the world in its darkness needs a clear witness to his light.
And so he gave us the Bible. God's word written by people who are God's witnesses to Jesus so that we can accept his light. The greatest of these witnesses is John the Baptist.
In our few verses there, he was an extraordinary person. You know, if you want to have a very, very good witness in a law court that to really get at the truth, you want somebody who's clear, somebody who's trustworthy, and somebody who is courageous.
[15:41] Especially in the face of hostile questioning. This is John. Because when he spoke about Jesus, he made people ready to meet Jesus.

His life work was all about preparing people to believe and receive Jesus, the light of the world. Thousands of people came into the wilderness to hear John preach.

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And he spoke humbly, but fearlessly and clearly about everyone's need for the forgiveness of their sins. Saying, that's your deepest need.
You need forgiveness. And secondly, you need to turn to God. This is your story. So when John sees Jesus finally come into the wilderness, what does he say?
He says, behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. And that is the message for you today and me.
[16:36] Trust that Jesus the Lamb dies in our place. You know, 500 years ago, one of the great theologians of art, of history, Martin Luther preached a sermon.

And he preached it on this verse. And he said something wonderful. He said, good Christian teachers direct people away from themselves and to Christ, as John the Baptist does here with his testimony.
He said, for all our sermons tend towards this one goal, that you may know and believe that Christ is the only Savior and consolation of the world.
That is our message. That's what we are all about as a church. And that's what all preachers should be about. And God speaks very openly and clearly today about Jesus, the only Savior, as your only consolation through the witnesses who wrote the Bible.
That's the gift of the Bible that you're looking at. And he also speaks through people in your life who are willing to share how the Bible witnesses to Jesus and what Jesus means to them.
[17:48] We need witnesses to the light. And what a blessing it is if you have had people witness to you and share with you. And we pray, God, that this is the gift that you receive.

And I want to close by saying, who is this for? Who is this light for? Well, that's what our last verse is. It's an invitation. It is an invitation to all.
Look at it. It says, the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. Very simply, that saying that that light that Jesus brings is for each person in the world.
Every person. This ultimate, perfect revelation of God that Jesus brings. And he says, you know, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father, is for you.
No matter what your circumstance. No matter what the darkness in your life might be. How far you feel away from God. What is happening that's swirling around you.
[18:53] No matter what is happening, that light is for you. It is an invitation for you to believe Jesus as your hope, as your light, as the way that you know God and his love for you.

He has come into the world for you. And that means Jesus is close to you. No matter what your situation. Therefore, there's a second invitation.
If God is that close, if he has given that light to each of you, there is an invitation that you are being called to give as well. And I want to close with this invitation, kind of laid out.
It's the call that's in Revelation 3.20. And in it, Jesus himself speaks. And he says, Behold, I stand at the door and I knock. He says, If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into them.
I will eat with them and they with me. This picture of fellowship and knowing the living God being part of his life. Now, I know that we may be very fearful of opening that door because it's a door into the dark, the darkness of the world.
[20:10] But Jesus, the light of the world, is the one who is knocking. And his light is for you. Will you open that door of your life to his light?

Let us pray together. Father, I thank you for your patience, that Jesus stands at the door and knocks on the door of our hearts.
We thank you that Jesus is the light of the world, the creator of the world, the one who is the perfect image of you, that he has shone into the lives of every person.
We thank you that you are a friend of sinners, forgiving the sins of all who come to you. And now, Father, we pray that you will give courage to us to receive this light so that we may know you forever and know the life that comes from being called your daughter, your son, because we have been reconciled to you.
God, help us to believe. Help us to receive Jesus, the light of the world. Amen.

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