

Light has come

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Now, don't these Christmas lights look good? Yes. I'm really thankful to the 40 or so people of the team who came in on Wednesday night and really, I don't know if I...

Pimped the church out, I suppose is a modern term. Thank you for laughing at me, my dear wife. Made the church look wonderful. Let's thank them. Yes. They've done a wonderful job.

The church looks great. And yet, it's a little bit weird that we put lights inside. It's a bit strange that we bring a tree into our house in December, or maybe November if you're particularly keen, and we put lights on it.

It's a bit strange that in the southern hemisphere, in the brightest and lightest part of the year, we go, do you know what we need? The sun is up to 8 o'clock at night. We need more lights.

You know, we're going to put up lights so that people can see the decorations in our house, but they can only see them from about 8.30. And, you know, I don't go out past the 8 o'clock these days, but this tradition comes from our European heritage, Australia's European heritage, where Christmas is the darkest time of the year.

[1 : 21] And so lights are put up because the season is dark, and so they're put up to light the way. But there is something much more symbolic in it.

It's not just because we need to see, but we generally don't like the dark. As children, we're... Sorry, I'm just struggling with this chord at the moment. As children, we are afraid of the things that go bump in the night.

But as adults, you know, suburbs put lights up in dark spots to reduce rates of crime. Light makes us feel safe. Rates of depression follow the season, increasing as the dark increases.

And so the lack of light has a palpable impact on us as humans. But this attitude of putting up lights in the dark, it's symbolic of also where we are as people.

We think that we can fix problems of darkness, the darkness of the world and the darkness of our hearts. We think that we can be the agents of change.

[2 : 26] We have light in us. We can fix the problems of society. We can fix the darkness out there. At least that's the optimistic view. The optimist says we can fix all of society's problems.

But the pessimist says that all you have to do is watch the news. People have been hurting each other for thousands of years and there's nothing we can do to ever change that. Now, I'm not sure which of those that you're more likely to be.

Do you fall on the more optimistic side or the more pessimistic side? I definitely chop and change between the two these days. But if we can vary between the two, what do we do?

Where does this light actually come from? If it doesn't come from within us, well, then we can be tempted to despair. Much like the pessimist, there is no hope.

Humanity is doomed. But what John 1 and Isaiah 9, that John has just read for us, show that there is a third way. It's not just optimism without looking at the world and it's not just pessimism.

[3 : 34] There is a third way. A way where we can see that the world is dark and terrible, but there also is a light. And we need a light that comes not from within us, but from outside of us.

We need the light to come. We need Jesus himself to light our darkened hearts and this darkened world. And a strange thing is going to happen.

A strange thing is going to happen for those that follow Jesus the light. It's the opposite of a tan.

You know, this time of year, I'm often trying to get a tan. What do we do? We go and spend time in the sun and the sun makes our skin darker.

But what happens when we spend time with the light Jesus? We actually become lighter. We become light like Jesus. And so as you would have noticed, we're in Christmas.

It's Christmas. I'm not sure if you're ready for Christmas. Christmas is ready for you, whether you are ready for it or not. December always seems to creep up on me, but it's here. It's Christmas. [4 : 36] And so for the next five weeks, we're in a series of Christmas because the light has come. God himself has come. And so we can now see because of Jesus.

We can have light and we can have hope. And so today, as we start this series, we're going to look at what the light is. We're going to look at what does it mean that Jesus is the light. And the challenge today for us will be for us to be light.

So as we do this, let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time at Christmas. Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to remind ourselves of the amazing joy that you became a person. God, as we spend the next four or five weeks getting ready for Christmas, buying presents, organizing feasts, help us not to miss the most significant part of Christmas, that you have lit our way home and that you are a light for us even now, Lord.

We ask this in your son's name. Amen. Three points for us today. You can be following along in the St. Paul's app. You can be making notes in there. First, we're going to see the dark.

[5 : 54] Then we're going to see the light. And then we're going to see reflections. Now, Christmas, it can often seem like Christmas is for kids. There's presents, and then there's more presents, and then there's presents from family members, and you've got to buy presents for your second cousin twice removed.

And then there's food, and there's candy canes, and there's chocolate. And a lot of it can seem like it's aimed at kids. But Isaiah 9, the very start of Isaiah 9, shows who Christmas is aimed for. It's not just for kids. It's not just for people who like decorations. Please have your Bibles open. We're going to look at Isaiah 9. We're going to spend a bit of time in Isaiah 9 today. More time in Isaiah 9 than in John 1.

So have your Bibles open. We're going to start in verse 1. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.

So who is this message of Christmas for?

[7 : 11] It is for those who are in gloom, who are in darkness and in distress. It's not really family-friendly, hallmark Christmas movie vibes.

I'm not sure if you're a hallmark Christmas movie type person. My Netflix has been inundated with these movies. It seems to be new sequels with the exact same cast and the exact same plot every year.

But that's what we think Christmas is, these nice, happy family vibes. But Isaiah 9 says that the message of Christmas comes to those who are in darkness, in distress.

And there's this description of the area of Galilee, of Galilee being in darkness. Galilee was in a really difficult spot in the nation of Israel.

They were the front door to the nations. So they were in the north. And if there was an invading army coming to Israel, they would come through Galilee first.

[8 : 12] Can you imagine being in Galilee and just, ah, there's another army coming? They're going to rape and pillage us first before they go any further?

Where is our help? Where is the army from Jerusalem coming to protect us? And so this message is for the broken and downcast and oppressed.

God is going to honour this town of Galilee in a special way. Galilee, in verse 2, is described as in darkness. The Bible also describes the whole world as in darkness.

We saw this in John 1. And it uses this term darkness to be both about evil and about ignorance. It's very similar to the way we'd use the language.

We use darkness to be, you know, oh, that person, he's in the dark. He has no knowledge. Sorry, Tom, I'm not actually meeting you. That person doesn't know what's happening. We also talk about it as evil.

[9 : 13] We talk about dark or black. Oh, that person, they've got a black heart. They've got darkness inside them. Or if you're like me, a Star Wars nerd, you'd say they've gone to the dark side.

In Chinese, you'd say something similar. It's xin hei. It's a dark heart. You don't have to look much further than what was happening in the time where Jesus was born.

It was a dark world filled with darkened hearts. Jesus' birth was a time of violence and injustice.

There was abuse of power, homelessness, refugees fleeing oppression, families ripped apart, people filled with grief. But that world isn't actually that different to ours now. We could say the same thing about all of those. Our time, just like Jesus, is a time of violence and injustice. There's abuses of power.

[10:12] There's homelessness. There's refugees fleeing injustice. There's families ripped apart. There's people filled with grief. Just like in Jesus' time, we see the dark and we long for the light, for justice and safety and protection from evil.

Humans have been longing for light and the love of light, of salvation. And we think that we can fix the problems around us.

We can think that all we have to do is have more technology. Then we can feed the world. All we need is to continue to innovate. All we need to do is continually to get to know the different cultures, to know each other.

And then there will be peace. Then we can fix the problems of war and racism. And we can hold up stories of what happened on Christmas Day in, I think it was 1942, World War II.

The battle lines are drawn between the Allies and the Nazis. And there is, you know, they're on either sides. Christmas Day comes and the war stops for a very brief moment.

[11:21] They go out there into no man's land and they play soccer. They probably called it football at the time. And it was joyful. They shared rations. They had a wonderful meal.

And we can see stories like that. And we can think, yes, see, people can do it. There is light within us. We can fix all the problems of the world. And it's very easy to forget that that was one day in 365.

And then the next day they just went back to war and killing each other. No one knows how to cure suffering and evil.

At the end of chapter 8 of Isaiah, the people try. They consult magicians and mediums instead of God. And the chapter finishes on a depressing note. They will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom.

Nothing really has changed. We still look to human resources to fix the problems of the world. You know, to go back to that kind of hallmark Christmas movie vibe, I'm not sure if you've been watching them on Netflix this year.

[12:28] I've seen a little bit of a couple. I can't really avoid it in my household. I'm not going to blame anybody in particular. We were watching one the other night.

And the theme always seems to be very similar. There's a problem. And romance and love need to happen. You know, there's some kind of Christmas miracle.

And then this couple bring a community together. You know, we watched... I can't remember. It was about a family being broken apart. But the Christmas miracle was that at Christmas, love prevailed. And the Christmas miracle was that this family was brought back together. Or a community comes together and a community is saved. And then there is happiness and peace. And we even say things like, don't do that at Christmas.

It's Christmas Day. Stop doing that. Can't you just love each other because it's Christmas? And we think that there is this specialness to Christmas time that should motivate people to peace and love and joy.

[13:33] And I've been catching myself... You know, yesterday we were setting up the Christmas tree. And so many times I wanted to say, just love each other because it's Christmas. But what's that got to do with the price of fish?

Which is a very strange Australian saying. I'm not sure where that comes from. But what has that got to do with the time? Because just because it's December doesn't mean that we should be loving anybody more.

But we seem to think that that is the message of Christmas. Love conquers all. It can unite us. We think that that is the message of Christmas. But here in Isaiah 9, the message of Christmas is that it is dark.

The world is evil and ignorant. We actually don't even realise how bad things are. And that's one of the reasons why social media for a lot of people is really difficult at the moment.

Because for the first time in human history, we can actually see how bad the world is. We can actually hear about terrible things going on. And we're not built to process that amount of darkness in the world.

[14 : 41] Thinking that humanity can save itself just leads to more darkness. And so the message of Christmas cannot be, let's be united.

Let's be peaceful. Let's love and the spirit of Christmas will bring us together. That can't be the message of Christmas. We grow up and learn that many of the fairy tales around Christmas aren't real.

And this is just another thing that we need to unlearn. We want to hold on to this view that the light is in us. And we can bring joy and the spirit of Christmas can help heal the world.

But this is just another part of Christmas that we need to unlearn. But the opposite message is also not true. It's not true that we are stuck in darkness and therefore we should give in.

That we should just become apathetic and not care. Instead, the message of Christmas is that the world is dark, but the light has come.

[15 : 41] Things are bad. Things are actually really, really bad. But there is a hope that has come. There is a light. And that light is a baby. It's our second point today, the light.

Isaiah 9, verse 6 says, Isaiah 9, verse 6 says, Isaiah 9 not only tells us who the light is, but also how we get the light.

This light, Jesus, the Son of God, born to die on a cross, raised to life. He is given to us. This light that comes to our darkened hearts and to our darkened world to reveal who we are and to reveal who God is.

He is given. The only way you can receive this is to admit that you need this free gift. It's a gift of grace that we don't deserve.

Christmas is about receiving gifts. But this is a gift that is really hard to receive. If you've ever been in financial trouble and someone has offered a large chunk of money, you know that some gifts are really hard to accept.

[17 : 05] You know, you have to swallow your pride. You have to admit, oh, actually, I really need this help. But imagine it was Christmas morning. Let's push ourselves forward.

What is it? 19 days or something. 20 days. 20 days to Christmas. And you open up a present. And there is a book there called How to Properly Put on Makeup for Your Face Shape.

How do you feel? What do you mean? What are you trying to say with this book? Is there an issue?

So, you know, you put that to one side, feeling a little hurt. And then you take another one.

You pull off the ribbon. You rip the wrapping paper apart because, you know, you never try and keep it. You just always throw it away. And there's another book there. And it's called How to Get Over Yourself and Your Own Pride.

You grab something out of the stocking. And it's raw grain. It's a can of raw grain to grow your hair back. Now, you could get angry at this point. You could get angry.

[18 : 07] Or you could admit that these gifts are hard to receive. To receive them, you have to admit that you are flawed. That you are weak and you need help.

That, you know, maybe you're terrible at putting on makeup and that you're arrogant and hard to be around or that you're balding. Now, I don't want to recommend anybody give these gifts. You know, don't say you need to grow in humility.

I'm going to give you this gift so you can learn about your weaknesses. That's not a good thing. But that is the meaning of Christmas. Is that we are weak. That we are flawed.

That my heart is dark. That the culture I'm living in is darkened. And it sends me scurrying around in the dark. And I can't pull myself together.

And I need this Christmas gift. No matter how hard it is to receive. I need to be saved by grace. I am in desperate need of this child.

[19 : 07] God's son given. And that title in Isaiah 6 is a wonderful title. The title of Jesus here. Sorry, Isaiah 9 verse 6.

Wonderful counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. He is a wonderful counselor. He is God become flesh.

He knows what it's like to be frail and to be human. And if God was really born in a manger. He is a God who understands us from the inside.

He's had the same experiences. There's no other religion that says that God suffered like his people. Jesus knew what it was like to be courageous in the face of suffering.

To be abandoned by friends. To be alone. To be crushed by injustice. To be tortured and to die. How amazing that we can take our burdens.

[20 : 10] Our pain and our grief to him. But he's also a mighty God. And he's everlasting father. And that means he's created the world. And it's easy at Christmas time.

To like the story of the baby born in the manger. But people didn't just like Jesus. We can't just like this story. They aren't.

People that knew Jesus. Either loved him and worshipped him. Or they hated him and killed him. There is no middle path. There is no I really like the story of Jesus.

I like the cute fluffy manger scene. You either love him and worship him as the mighty God. Or you hate him. There is no in between. And Tim Keller makes the wonderful point.

That it's too limiting. It's too small. To say that we should celebrate Jesus. Born at Christmas. We should stare dumbstruck. Lost in wonder.

[21 : 10] That the mighty God. Became like us. You know that feeling when you see. A really wonderful Christmas light display. You know there's a couple of houses around.

That you know we try and find. And you rock up there. My first question is always. How much is this costing for the electricity bill? Because the light. The house is just lights everywhere.

And there's you know inflatable Santas. There's just. There's things to look at. And for a lot of those places. You just stand. And stare in wonder. Oh there's that.

Oh there's look at that. There's this thing over here. And then you know there's a coffee cart. That's parked on the street. And there's a Mr. Whippy van. And there's people coming from far and wide to look. And you know make money out of it.

But we take photos and we share them. Look at this display. How much more the true light himself Jesus. Should we be staring at.

[22 : 08] Dumbstruck in wonder. Amazed. At his goodness. That the light himself has come. John 1.9 says that Jesus is the light.

But also he is going to give the light. That's our third point today. That we are to be reflections. The light that we so desire to have.

That we want to have to conquer evil and suffering. Jesus gives it. The light comes from Jesus. And he gives it to his disciples.

Jesus says in Matthew 5. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp.

And put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand. And it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way. Let your light shine before others.

[23 : 05] That they may see your good deeds. And glorify your father in heaven. Jesus says that. We. The church. Are the light of the world.

We have seen the light. Jesus. And we get to take. This light. That we are celebrating here today. We get to take this. To the diversity of Chatswood. To our friends.

And to our families. One way to understand this. Is that. We are like the moon. The moon has no light of its own.

The sun sets. The sun goes down. But we can continue to see the light of the sun. Reflected in the moon. The moon doesn't have any light of its own. But it bounces back the light of the sun.

And we can still see. And you know on those nights when it's a full moon. It's like actually it's pretty bright out here. I can see pretty well. We are to be the moon. To bask in the light and the glory of Jesus.

[24 : 06] And to shine that out. So that no matter how dimly we shine to the people around us. People would realize that they're in the dark. The sun has gone.

But his light continues to shine. On us. And from us. The sun has gone to heaven. But his light still shines.

The light shines against the darkness. It reveals things for what they are. It gets rid of deceptions and half-truths. And so Jesus in Matthew 5 called us to let the light shine from us.

So that people would see our good deeds. For the first time in a while. We've set Christmas lights up outside our building.

Very much like that passage in Matthew 5. We want to be a light on a hill. We want the church building to be noticed. So that people say. Oh wow. Look at that light on a hill.

[25 : 05] Doesn't it look nice? But how much more do we want the people of Chatswood? The people in our families. Our friends. The people on our front lines. To see our good deeds of love and generosity.

And forgiveness. How we go out of our way to shine as a light. So that people say. Wow. Look at that person. Where did they get that light from?

And we want to be the moon to people. So we can say. Don't look at me. I'm just doing what Jesus has done. He is the true light. And so. I have three encouragements.

Three brief encouragements. Of what it could be like. What it could look like to be the light of Jesus today. First of all. From Matthew 5. Don't hide your light.

Imagine. You know. When you're stuck in the dark. And you're stumbling around. You've stubbed your toe. You're crying a little bit from that. You're hitting your shins.

[26 : 07] And then you realize that there's somebody just standing at the light switch. Why didn't you turn the light on? Let's not be like that person. Let's not hide our light from the people around us.

Even the people in our families. Even the people who might already know Jesus. Let's not hide our light. Let's do what Matthew 5 says. To show the light in good deeds. To love.

People are stuck in darkness. And without us. They will continue to be ignorant of Jesus. So don't hide your light. Secondly. Take your light where it's dark.

As we've encouraged. We've got piles of these out on the table. And we've got these candy canes. Now I had my first candy cane of the season yesterday. And I forgot how much I like a good candy cane.

Now these candy canes are not for you. I did have one child this morning say. Can I have a candy cane? I said. No. They're for your friends. If you eat them. People can't get to hear about Jesus. And they're committed.

[27 : 07] They want to take 10 of them to their friends. To invite them to our carol service on the 19th. And that's wonderful. I'm going to trust them with 10 of those. I will maybe encourage their parents. Just to encourage them.

To make sure they get to their friends. But I want to encourage you to do the same thing. Just like Jess. I'm going to be giving these out to people in my street. Now I need to talk to Ian and Helen. Who are here.

To make sure I don't do the same people as them. But you know what? Maybe those people can have two or three candy canes. That's probably okay. Keep me accountable as well. I want to be encouraging.

The people I know and love around me. With a little gift. To say hey. There's something happening. Come and see this Jesus.

Share the good news of Jesus. Is what we should be doing. Invite people to Christmas here with us. But we can think. Job done. I have been the light to people.

[28 : 04] I have shared the good news. And that's a really good thing. Do that. But we can think. That's all I need to do. To be light to people. And it's not Matthew 5 said.

Share the light in love and good deeds. And so do that. By sitting with people in grief. Offer. Help. Or food.

Christmas is a time. Where people feel very far from families. The last two years have been particularly difficult for many people. Because we haven't been able to see family. To see friends. It can be emphasized in this season. Where a lot of people are away from friends or family or feeling lonely. Extend love to them in this season.

So. Don't hide your light. Secondly. Take your light to where it's dark. And thirdly. Shine together.

[29 : 00] You might not be feeling like the fullest of moons. Reflecting the light of Jesus. You might actually be feeling like that. What's it called? When it's just a sliver of moon? Eclipse.

Yep. Thank you. You might be feeling like an eclipsed moon. You might be feeling like if somebody looked at you. There's a whole lot of worries and anxieties getting in the way of the light of Jesus shining through your life.

And so let me encourage you. Shine with other people. Take someone with you. Take another person. Take another light. What could your community group do?

I'm very aware that most community groups have only got a couple of weeks left. And then it's Christmas. And then, you know, January's kind of out. But what could your community group do?

Who could your family love?

I think this was one of my favorite parts of Wednesday night. We set up all the Christmas decorations. But there was just this team of 20 or so people sorting all of the toys and tucker for us.

[29 : 55] It was really wonderful seeing people get in and pack boxes so that we can do love and good deeds for people down in Kullborough. Steve's going to be dropping them off on Monday night.

And they are ready to be serving that community to love them. To give them an opportunity to come and hear Jesus. And do you know what? To just love people like Jesus is loved.

How can you be shining the light of Jesus on mission? We, as a church, can have a far greater impact than if we're trying to do things on our own.

And so at Christmas time, we love to celebrate light. But this year, let's reflect more on Jesus so that we can reflect his light to the world.

Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, are you a mighty God, everlasting Father.

[30 : 57] We thank you for all your goodness to us in Jesus. That you not only prophesied him from many years ago. But that you sent him for us, people lost in the dark.

Just as Isaiah 9 said, people in the dark, darkened hearts and in an evil and darkened time.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jesus, that he is light.

That we can know you. Heavenly Father, help us be light to the world. God, you have given us this incredible privilege.

Help us not hide it under a bowl. Help us to shine light. To share the good news of Jesus. To invite people. Lord, we want to see many people come to know and love you.

But Lord, there are many people in our lives. People that you know who they are. That we long to see saved. Father, help us be praying for them.

[31 : 59] Help us be deliberate. And help us to share love and good deeds. And Father, help us do that together. We ask this in your son's name. Amen.