



JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

It's beginning to look like Christmas! Lights and decorations seem to be everywhere, inside and outside of our buildings. **THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD IS COMING!** Who is the Light? Why did He Come? How do we fit into this story of lights?

Let's hear the Christmas message in a different way. Let's consider a major Biblical contrast: Light vs. Darkness. From the Scriptures and through every hymn, let's see the Light of the World.

In the beginning... God said, "*Let there be light*" and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Genesis 1:1, 3-4 Then God continued with His creation until He pronounced all of it to be good. The first humans lived in His world in perfect harmony with all creation and in perfect peace with the Creator. We can almost imagine the smiling face of God shining upon His beautiful world.

Then sin entered the perfect world. Satan, also known as the Prince of Darkness, brought disobedience, pain, loss of perfection, and every kind of evil inclination.

But God in His mercy promised to send a Light, someone who could conquer all the darkness of sin. And those who believed this promise, as do we, watched and waited.

O Lord how shall I meet you, How welcome you a-right? Your people long to greet you, My hope, my heart's delight! Oh, kindle, Lord most holy. Your lamp within my breast To do in spir-it low-ly All that may please you best.	He comes to judge the nations, A terror to his foes, A light of consolations And blessed hope to those Who love the Lord's appearing. O glorious Sun, now come, Send forth your beams so cheering, And guide us safely home. (LW 19:1, 6; TLH 58:1, 9)
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Darkness (Room is completely darkened. Leader may ask group to name deeds of darkness, or leader may list evil things around us, in our world, in our hearts)

(Someone strikes a match.) But no amount of darkness can quench even a small light!

Light the first Advent Candle

God renewed His promise of a Savior to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who was renamed Israel. The people of Israel longed for deliverance when they were slaves in Egypt. Even

there God demonstrated His power over darkness. He sent “darkness” over Egypt-darkness that can be felt...*So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.* Exodus 10:22-23 GOD TOOK CARE OF HIS OWN!

This was the 9th plague. After the 10th, the killing of the firstborn, Moses led the people out of bondage. And how did God lead His people? By a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. So, in this way God provided warmth and light at night.

Oh, come, our Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Em-man-u-el
Shall come to you, O Is-ra-el! (LW 31:6, TLH 62:3)

Light the second Advent candle

David and other psalmists praised God in these words:

- *You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.* (18:28)
- *The Lord is my light and my salvation-whom shall I fear?* (27:1)
- *For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling that I may walk before God in the light of life.* (56:13)
- *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* (119:105)

Light the third Advent candle

Then Isaiah encouraged and prophesied:

- *Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.* (2:5)
- *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.* (9:2)
- *...I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.* (49:6b)
- *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.* (60:1-3)

Light the fourth Advent candle

Micah said, *But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.* (7:7,8b)

Finally, the time had come! Jesus came! Let's join in these hymn verses:

The Light Eternal, breaking through,
Made the world to gleam a-new;
His beams have pierced the core of night,
He makes us children of the light.
Alleluia!

Such grace toward us now fills with light
Length and breadth and depth and height!
O endless ages, raise your voice;
O Christendom, rejoice, rejoice!
Alleluia! (LW 35:4, 6)

Hail the heav' n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Ris' n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth,
Born to give us second birth,
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn king!" (LW 49:3, TLH 94:3)

Light the Christ candle

Speaking of Christ, John writes in his gospel, *In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world... Yet to all who received 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.* (1:4-9, 12-13)

Jesus Himself taught about light and darkness. He said, *Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.* (John 3:19-21)

One of St. Paul's references to "light" comes in 2 Corinthians 4:5-6: *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* That is how we are part of the story! **HE MADE HIS LIGHT SHINE IN OUR HEARTS!** As we heard earlier, He gave us the right to become children of God: so He is the Light of the world, and He has chosen us to be His children, or His lights!

The shepherds heard the story The angels sang that night
How Christ was born of Mary He was the Son of light.
To Bethlehem they ran To find him in the manger As angel heralds sang.

This flow'r, so small and tender, With fragrance fills the air;
His brightness ends the darkness That kept the earth in fear.
True God and yet true man, He came to save his people
From earth's dark night of sin. (LW 67:3, 4; TLH 645:3, 4)

Dear friends, Jesus our Light has told us we are to let our lights so shine before men that they may see Him! He wants to be the Rescuer of everyone who is still in darkness. He wants us to shine with His light in this dark world!

Let us join together in prayer:

Renew me, O eternal light, And let my heart and soul be bright,
Illumined with the light of grace That issues from your holy face.

Grant that I only you may love And seek those things which are above
Till I behold you face to face, O Light eternal, through your grace.
(LW 373:1, 4; TLH 398:1, 4)

Dear Savior, thank you for coming to all who were in darkness. Thank you for shining your light of salvation into our hearts. May the lights of Advent and Christmas and Epiphany draw all nations to your life-giving light. Amen.

Let us share our candlelight with each other as we contemplate the Son of God, love's pure light and the radiance that beams from His holy face.

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright Round yon virgin mother and child
Holy Infant, so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight; Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing, Alleluia! Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light Radiant beams from your holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at your birth, Jesus Lord, at your birth.
(LW 68; TLH 646)

Note: This devotional is most effective if you provide either an Advent wreath or just 4 candles plus a white candle, which can represent the Christ candle. Also, beforehand, pass out to your group small candles with a drip sleeve. You may also mark certain sections to be read by several readers.

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