

## John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

<sup>9</sup>The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. <sup>13</sup>They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup>John testified about him. He cried out, "This was the one I spoke about when I said, 'The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.'" <sup>16</sup>For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is close to the Father's side, has made him known.

## Light of the World

### I.

Darkness. And a hush. Very few sounds, and very little light. The darkness seems to envelop you. Pinpricks of light high above do little to illuminate the scene. Now and again an animal disturbs the silence. Their shapes barely disrupt the shadows as the inky blackness seems to wrap around them like a blanket.

Keeping watch. It's a hard thing to do when you can barely see your hand in front of your face sometimes. It's a hard thing to do when there are only a handful of people out there to make conversation with from time to time between rounds of the animals. It's a boring and exhausting business, keeping watch over the flocks at night.

Then... a light pierces the night sky. An angel brings news. It might seem difficult to believe at first. How could it be? Virtually the first people to know of the special birth the whole country has been awaiting for centuries are just common shepherds out in the fields near the little town of Bethlehem.

Perhaps you aren't sure whether to believe it or not. You aren't important enough to be the first to receive the news. Suddenly, however, the skies are filled. Where moments before there had been only a few stars, now "There was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind'" (Luke 2:13-14, EHV).

What a concert! No pyrotechnics needed. No amplifiers and speakers filling the concert hall. No matter what Christmas concerts you might have seen this year, I dare say the one seen and heard by the shepherds topped them all.

Darkness pierced through with light dominates the Christmas story. The stable in which Mary and Joseph sought refuge from the elements was set back from the inn at Bethlehem—back in the darkness beyond the oil lamps that welcomed the guests who got there before the rooms were filled. The virgin Mary gives birth to the Savior at night. We've already mentioned the shepherds in the fields and the angel choirs who brought them the good news that the prophecy had been fulfilled. A bright star shines from the midnight skies to grab the attention of the Wise Men. Presumably, those Magi travel mostly at night, guided by the star to the birthplace of the Savior.

We don't even know the exact month and date when Jesus was born. Even the year is uncertain. To be sure, the modern calendar is calculated according to the life and times of Jesus. In 525 AD a man named Dionysius calculated the year of Jesus' birth and started counting the years since his birth as AD, for Anno Dominum—The Year of our Lord. Dionysius miscalculated. Jesus was born sometime between 7 BC and 4 BC.

The whole world uses this same calendar, but secular people don't want to acknowledge Jesus. Rather than using BC for Before Christ, and AD for Anno Dominum, they have taken to naming the periods BCE for Before Common Era, and CE for Common Era. The reality is, however, that they are still counting years according to the birth of Christ, however flawed the calculation was.

This dark time of the year works well for our celebration of Jesus' birth. We like to light up the night with Christmas lights everywhere—on Christmas trees, lawns, shrubs, hanging from the rooftops of our houses, even shop windows. The light grabs our eyes and compels our attention to focus on the nativity of Christ. His light penetrates the darkness.

## II.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...<sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:1, 4-5, EHV). The darkness that most needs penetrating has nothing to do with winter and its lack of daylight hours. The real darkness is the sin that has dominated our world since Adam and Eve.

Even before sin, the Word existed. At the very beginning, when the world was created, Jesus—the Word—was with God the Father. He is the real light—God the Father promised to Adam and Eve that he would send a special Seed who would deal with the sin that caused their separation from God.

Although the light shines in the darkness, the forces of darkness resist and push back. The darkness cannot defeat the light—it cannot overcome the light—but darkness tries to hold back as many as possible with its power.

“The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him” (John 1:9-11, EHV).

Prophet after prophet forecast the truth—that Jesus would come. Sometimes people say that it would be easier to believe in God if he would just identify himself and show them what he came to do—show them the light, so to speak.

But when the Light himself came, people in Jesus' own day did not see the light. They turned away from his light and hid in their own darkness. Satan still likes to make the darkness tantalizing. People today have more than just Moses and the Prophets—we have the completed history of God's saving activity. Yet many turn to darkness.

“But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to

become children of God. <sup>13</sup>They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13, EHV).

Some believe. It has always been that some believe, while others reject the truth. The process of believing in Jesus is not something a person can work out for oneself. It is not logical—God's plan is not logical, God's method is not logical, the faith God *gives* that believes in Jesus is not logical. There is nothing about you or in you that can produce faith. It is like being born.

Even those born again into faith in Jesus have moments in which we hide in the shadows and have to be called back to the light. We like to try to conceal the little wicked sins that entice you—the evils you enjoy and cling to, despite having seen the light and heard the gospel. We all have our own darkness—fear, guilt, obsessiveness, loneliness, helplessness.

### III.

"The Word became flesh and dwelled among us" (John 1:14, EHV). This is Immanuel. God in the flesh is born into your darkness. This light brings "God with us."

What deep, dark sins are lurking in the inky blackness of your past? Jesus came to dwell among us, in our deepest and most secret places. Jesus comes to touch our hearts. His light penetrates deep, deep down. We cannot sink so low that Christ's light cannot reach us there. His light goes deeper and lower than we have ever descended.

Jesus began his descent when he left the heavens to come down to us as a newborn child. The Apostles' Creed enumerates the phases, or stages, of Jesus' humiliation: "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." It was not as though each of these stages was a lower and lower humiliation—they simply detail things that signal the humiliation Jesus was willing to suffer for us. The humiliation Jesus suffered for us is heard most acutely with his words from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, EHV).

The humble Jesus who was once forsaken by the Heavenly Father in order to make full payment for all the darkness we continue to perpetrate did not stay humble. The Apostles' Creed again lists Jesus' stages of exaltation. "He descended into hell." This was not to suffer—that happened on the cross, when Jesus cried out when the Heavenly Father forsook him there—he went to hell to proclaim his victory over Satan. The Creed continues: "The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead."

### IV.

This Jesus—both truly God and truly human—the One who purchased salvation for the world, is the One of whom John says: "No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is close to the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18, EHV).

The Jesus who was humbled for us and exalted for us still comes to our chaos. He visits us and stays by us. He promises to never leave us or forsake us. He will sit beside us in the dark and comfort us, no matter how miserable we feel.

Jesus' light shines on us continuously. There is no day and night cycle to his light—it is always there. Christ is there, even in our darkness, to nourish us and sustain us—to walk with us. He is always there to guide us. His light will envelop us and keep us safe.

Lord Jesus, shine your light on us throughout this new year, and for all eternity. Amen.