

Light Dawns on another Christmas Day

John 1:1-14 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is a special morning, isn't it? For me, I'm still basking in the Christmas Eve afterglow of getting to preach to so many people with a lot of new faces. This morning, I woke up just a bit earlier than normal. My family was all smiles as the boys tore into their presents. And I know after worship, I get to go back home, put on comfy pants, turn on the Packers (boo, if you want), and bask in the glow of Christmas while eating lunch. This is a day of joy and celebration – not just for the gifts we received from others, but of the greatest gift of all time: Jesus Christ, God come in flesh to be with us, who has taken on my sin, who has covered me with his perfect life – just as he has for you.

Now, I'm sure that everyone's Christmas Day morning has been a little different - whether it was a low key, sleep in or stay in your new jammies enjoying presents or sipping on a cup of coffee or hot chocolate, maybe sneaking a few Christmas cookies, until it was time to come to worship. Some of you will head off to be with family after service, preparing for more presents, more food, more laughs, more smiles, more hugs. Others will be heading home like me and enjoying a fairly quiet day.

What I have a hard time picturing is anyone here today who got up this morning like it was a typical weekday, workday morning, that you had to fight the urge of hitting the snooze button, that you reluctantly drug yourself out of bed, that you shuffled to the coffee maker all bleary eyed to get that first cup, that while you drank it, you didn't respond to anyone with full sentences but merely with agitated grunts...unless you're a Scrooge.

Then again, maybe Christmas Day isn't all smiles and sunshine for you. For some, this day brings with it a lot of pain, remembering those that you don't get to be with, don't get to eat with, don't get to exchange gifts with. You might even have or are planning to visit the gravestone or to reminisce of that person through pictures. Christmas Day is a little different for you, and it makes you unsettled. Maybe you're a little peeved that the pastor is talking about wearing comfy pants and watching football in the comfort of his home while you're struggling to put a smile on your face. It was a struggle getting everyone up and going to church this morning, that Christmas Day should be a day where we all still in in our new pajamas. The kids are too hyped up and excited about their presents that they want to get back to them and so they have kind of been little monsters today. You didn't sleep well last night. You know that you are going to visit family later today, and you are dreading the drama or the disapproving looks as they make their judgments of your life known. Maybe today doesn't seem so bright. Maybe it feels a little dark.

But there is something different about today, something to break through the darkness, something to put a smile on your face. "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (verses 9, 14) The true light, God made flesh, has come into our world! After years, millennia even, of waiting, God has made good on his promise. He has come into our world to crush the head of the devil. This brings us light even on a dark day.

"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." (verse 4) The Apostle John describes the Son of God coming into our world as light, like a sunrise at daybreak. This world is a dark place. There is a lot that can make us feel resentful of what we have or don't have, of what others have, of what we suffer and others don't, of our situation not matching one of those Norman Rockwell paintings. Even though we came because we believe that God exists and that he is good to us in spite of ourselves, we also see all kinds of darkness and evil in this world. We live lives with so many frustrations. We're so tired. Most mornings we do reluctantly get up, shuffle to the coffee maker, and grunt at people instead of smiling and rejoicing with Christmas cheer.

But then the light comes. Sunrises are beautiful, aren't they? There is something about watching all the darkness of night scatter away at first light. The darkness cannot resist the light; it has to go away. With the light, everything becomes clearer. The brightness of it lifts you up, signifies a hope, a newness. Things can be different because it's a new day. You feel a little more chipper. Light brings positivity for us as the darkness cannot hang on or resist the light. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (verse 5)

The light that has shone into the darkness of our world is the Word made flesh. God, full of grace and truth, is here. The only one who could live a perfect life for us and scatter our darkness has indeed come. The only one who could pay our outstanding debt of sin has come. He did this so that we would belong to God's family, that we would become children of God – "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (verse 13)

Because Jesus came into the world and took away our sins and covered us with his perfection, we are a part of his family. He does not look down on us disapprovingly, shaking his head because we didn't live up to expectations, because we're not as good of parents as we ought to be, because we don't work as hard as that other person, because we didn't make the right choices. No, we are accepted and loved as ones approved by God, as ones who belong in the family of God – not by anything we did, but entirely by him coming into the world, of his light shining in the darkness of our world, of our lives, to scatter our sin and fill us with his holiness. We have that light every day as we belong in the family of God because Jesus, the Light, has come. Light dawns on us on another Christmas Day!

The best part about this light that dawns on us on Christmas Day is that it never stops shining – kind of like the actual sun. Yeah, we talk about the sun going down, but the sun does not go away or stop shining during the night. Instead, we know that the sun still continues to shine as it scatters darkness in other parts of the world. The light always shines, never taking a break. So it is with God. This is what God wants us to remember as we consider that he, the light, has come into the world. His gift of himself never stops shining, never takes a break. Sometimes the darkness is in our lives and it feels overwhelming and all encompassing, but the sun has not stopped shining. We are forgiven. We are loved. We are accepted and approved as a part of God's family because the light has dawned on us!

We have this light every day and all the time. This means that darkness of this world – the sin, the depression, the frustrations, the evil, the disappointments, the disapproving looks, the poverty, the temptations, the failing health, the grief, the sadness – all of these things will come to an end. You are secure in the light, in God. Darkness cannot overcome you.

The light has dawned on us on another Christmas Day. His love for us, the forgiveness he won for us, our standing in the family of God, we have these things all the time because the light, God, never stops shining. We live in the light of another Christmas Day – not just today, but every single day because the Son, the Word made flesh, the one full of grace and truth, is always shining on us. Amen!