

Why Christmas? Light
John 12:46
ABC 12/24/23

One of the many things people like about Christmas is all the lights. After all, Christmas comes right during the darkest part of the year. Legend has it that Martin Luther was the 1st to use Christmas lights in the early 1500s. The story is one Christmas Eve he went for a walk in the woods near his house & was struck with the beauty of a group of evergreen trees as they glistened in the ice & snow. He wanted to share the beauty with his family, so he cut down one of the trees & put it in his house, decorating it with candles. Over the years the tradition caught on & people started bringing in Christmas trees & lighting them with candles. Along came Thomas Edison in the 1880s with his invention of the light bulb & to promote it he decorated a Christmas tree with electric lights. Things have taken off from there. As a matter of fact...

Timothy & Grace Gay of Union Vale, New York, have held the Guinness World Record for most lights on a residential property since 2014. This year, they have more than 720,000 lights, all programmed to music. It takes them 3 months to set up the display with 40 miles of lights & 8 miles of extension cords.¹

While that's impressive (I only have 3 strands totaling 75 lights) it doesn't hold a *candle* to the answer to *Why Christmas?* found in Jn 12:46. Here Jesus gives us another reason why He came to this earth. He says, **I have come *as* Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.** I had planned on tracing the use of light & darkness throughout Scripture & seeing how Jesus is the Light of the world which dispels darkness. But with over 250 references to *light* & 150+ references to *darkness* I decided you didn't want to be here until tomorrow. As we've gathered here on Christmas Eve, we once again ask, *Why did Jesus leave the glory of heaven & take on human flesh & be born a Baby? Why Christmas?* We've already seen Jesus Himself give 2 reasons: 1) **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, & to give His life a ransom for many** (Mk 10:45). 2) **For the Son of Man has come to seek & to save that which was lost** (Lk 19:10). Last week we saw John give 6 reasons for Christmas found in his 1st letter. 3) Sinless Jesus came to take away our sins; to be our sin-bearer (1 Jn 3:5); 4) To destroy the works of the

¹ <https://kvia.com/news/2023/12/13/home-holds-guinness-world-record-for-most-christmas-lights-on-residential-property/>

devil (1 Jn 3:8); 5) To show us the love of God so that 6) we might have life (1 Jn 4:9). Not only that, but 7) He came to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Jn 4:10). He then summarizes the why of Christmas saying 8) God sent His **Son to be the Savior of the world** (1 Jn 4:14). Today we see that Jesus came 9) **as Light into the world** (Jn 12:46). Jesus is telling us what Christmas is actually about. He was born that 1st Christmas to bring light into darkness. Let's stand if you're able & read responsively:

Nate: In the beginning God created the heavens & the earth.

People: The earth was formless & void, & darkness was over the surface of the deep,

Nate: & the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said...

ALL: "Let there be light," & there was light.

People: God saw the light was good; & God separated the light from the darkness.

Nate: The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.

People: Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.

Nate: In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, & the Word was God.

People: He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him,

ALL: In Him was life, & the life was the Light of men.

Nate: The Light shines in the darkness, & the darkness did not comprehend it.

People: There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

Nate: & the Word became flesh & lived among us, & we have seen His glory, the glory as of a Father's only Son, full of grace & truth.

ALL: I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.²

That's just a sampling of what Scripture says about light & darkness. Open to Jn 12. Vs 44 says, **Jesus cried out & said...** This is an impassioned call from the lips of Jesus to you & me this Christmas. **Jesus cried out & said... I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me**

² from Genesis 1:1-5; Isaiah 9:2; John 1:1-5, 9, 14; 8:12

will not remain in darkness (46). All I want to do this morning is ask & answer 2 questions: What does it mean to **remain in darkness**? & what does it mean that Jesus came **as Light**?

1. Darkness What does it mean to be in darkness? *Darkness* has been defined as 1) *the partial or total absence of light* or 2) *wickedness or evil*.³ The light of Jesus' 1st Advent dawned in days of deep spiritual darkness. God had been silent for 400 years. Zecharias prophesied of the Messiah's coming to give light to those who **sit in darkness & the shadow of death** (Lk 1:79). That's where God's people found themselves that 1st Christmas. Mt 4:16 (echoing Isaiah 42) captures that darkness & the inbreaking of light: **The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, & those who were sitting in the land & shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned.** They were **sitting in darkness ... in the land & shadow of death** as they waited for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus didn't come to a world already ablaze with comfort & joy. He came to announce good news of great joy to those drowning in a sea of sin. He came as Light, shining in the darkness of rebellion against God. *Light & dark* are favorite images of John's to describe the grace of God in Jesus, that's light, & our sin & need, that's darkness. For example, Jn 1:5 speaking about the coming of Jesus, says, **The Light shines in the darkness, & the darkness did not comprehend it.** Darkness is opposed to light. It would if it could, overcome it, though it can't do so. Have you noticed that we have light switches but no *dark switches*? Light overcomes darkness. In Jn 3:19 we read **that the Light has come into the world, & men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.** Darkness is the realm of evil deeds where rebellion & sin rule. In Jn 8 Jesus said, **I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life** (12). Darkness is clearly spiritual & everlasting death. This is what it means to be in **darkness**. This is the bad news, we're all in **darkness**. That's where we are until we receive the Light of Jesus. The good news of great joy that will be for all people, makes no sense at all if we don't understand that we're all in the **darkness** of the devil's domain. Without understanding the nature of the **darkness**, we'll always struggle to understand the why of Christmas. The hard truth is we were all born in the **darkness** of sin. We walk in spiritual darkness & in death. That's our natural condition. But no one

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

needs to remain in that darkness. That's what Christmas is for, to chase away your darkness. Christmas is about shining light into the darkness.

2. Light What is *light*? *Light* has been defined as 1) *the natural agent that stimulates sight, something that makes vision possible* or 2) *spiritual illumination*.⁴ National Geographic once ran an article called, *The Power of Light*. It begins:

*Light reveals the world to us. Body & soul crave it. Light sets our biological clocks. It triggers in our brains the sensations of color. Light feeds us, supplying the energy of plants to grow. It inspires us with special effects like rainbows & sunsets. Light gives us life-changing tools, from incandescent bulbs to lasers & fiber optics. Scientists don't fully understand what light is or what it can do. They just know that it will illuminate our future.*⁵

What does Jesus mean when He says He is Light? *The light metaphor is steeped in OT allusions*.⁶ Ps 27:1 declares, **The Lord is my light & my salvation**. The psalmist talks about **the light of God's presence** (Ps 44:3). Ps 119:105 affirms, **Your word is a lamp to my feet & a light to my path**. Isaiah predicts a glorious future (fulfilled in Rev 21:23-24) when believers won't have the sun for light, because we'll **have the Lord for an everlasting light** (60:19-22). In his 1st letter John declares, **This is the message we have heard from Him & announce to you, that God is Light, & in Him there is no darkness at all** (1 Jn 1:5). Thus for Jesus to state, **I have come as Light into the world** (Jn 12:46), is to claim to be God & He's claiming to have the power to deliver those who believe in Him from Satan's domain of darkness (Col 1:13). Jn 3:20-21 refers to Jesus as the Light:

For everyone who does evil hates the Light, & does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

In Jn 9:5, just before He opened the eyes of the man born blind, Jesus repeated, **While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world**. & in Jn 12:35-36, Jesus taught:

For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.

The world without Jesus is in spiritual & moral darkness. They don't understand the things that the Spirit of God has revealed in His Word (1 Cor 2:14). They're darkened in their understanding &

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

⁵ Quoted by Brian Bills, www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/light-in-the-darkness/

⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p 337

excluded from the life of God (Eph 4:18). We need Light to scatter the darkness of our sin & there's only one Light capable of piercing the darkness of our spiritual condition. Jesus has come as that Light. What did Jesus mean when He said, **I have come as light**? What was He talking about? How does Jesus shine His light? Vss 47-50...

If anyone hears My sayings & does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me & does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say & what to speak.

How does Jesus shine His light? The light of Jesus dawns in our lives by His Word. How we respond to His Word determines everything. It's clear you can't believe in Jesus & not receive, keep, nor trust His words. Yet that's the position many people hold. They want to say, *Oh yes, I believe in Jesus. I just don't believe what He says.* That's absurd. The way Jesus shines the light He came to give is through His gospel found in His Word. You might be listening to me right now with impatience. Maybe you have a family dinner to get to. Perhaps you have guests arriving soon or you have grandkids to hug, gifts to give, & traditions to keep. I don't want to delay any of that for no good reason. But if Jesus' light pierces the darkness by His Word, surely all that can wait. If His Word shines the light of life into the dark blackness of our sinful hearts, surely we can linger longer to listen to Him, the One whose birth we're here to celebrate. The Light of the world is shining in His gospel this Christmas Eve. What a shame if we decorate our homes with lights yet stay in the darkness of sin & death because we refuse to listen to Jesus.

What does Jesus' light reveal? Vss 44-45 tell us, **He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me.** Jesus' light lets us see God. In fact, there's no other way to see God, to know Him but through Jesus. **No one comes to the Father,** Jesus said, **but through Me** (Jn 14:6). If you want God, you must have Jesus. If you don't respond to His Light by trusting Him, bowing before Him, & embracing Him by faith, His light will one day expose you. We try to cover our broken, messy lives & our sinful, guilty hearts with a veneer of Christmas cheer & hope it won't be exposed. But Jesus says judgment is coming. Do you see why Christmas is a matter of urgency? Jesus came as a Light & He shines into our darkness because

judgment is coming for everyone. Jesus comes as the Light because we're spiritually blind & cannot find our own way. Jesus took on humanity & died because we're too morally ruined to be pardoned any other way. Jesus gave Himself to us & so we must give ourselves to Him.⁷ Into a sinful world of suffocating darkness, Jesus came as Light. He came to triumph. But holding the darkness at bay didn't mean His victory was easy or immediate. **He came to His own, & those who were His own did not receive Him** (Jn 1:11). With the coming of Christ, Light had dawned. He calls us out of the darkness & into His Light of life (Jn 8:12). But while the Light had come, & would prevail, it wasn't easy. As He went to the cross, He told those arresting Him, **This is your hour, & the power of darkness** (Lk 22:53 ESV). Judas went out from the Twelve, & **it was night** (Jn 13:30). As Jesus was on the cross, the battle of the ages between darkness & light was being fought. What was happening on the cross, God echoed in nature. **It was now about the sixth hour, & darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, because the sun was obscured** (Lk 23:44–45; cf Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33). The Light of the world was covered in darkness in order to bring us into God's beautiful light (1 Pt 2:9). The darkness was a supernatural physical darkness. God made it dark because it was the darkest moment of history. It was Jesus suffering the wrath of God against sin & dying for those sins. Not only was the darkness physical, it was figurative as well. The darkness represents the divine judgment on sin as Jesus bore our sins. He was perfectly sinless & wasn't being judged for His sin but for ours. It was at this time that God unleashed His wrath on Jesus. It was at this time of darkness that God imputed our sins to Him. It was at this time that Jesus died as a substitute, paying the ransom for us. It was at this time that He died so that we may live. It was at this time that **He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him** (2 Cor 5:21). This is the why of Christmas. This is the good news of Jesus. Jesus came to die & He did & was buried. On Sunday morning some women came early to the tomb, *while it was still dark*, & saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb (Jn 20:1). In the belly of darkness, the Light began to shine anew. Jesus was alive with indestructible life. Once & for all, Light had dealt **darkness** its deathblow. Jesus has come & conquered. The Light

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth behind the Birth of Christ*, p 2

has triumphed. Even as we endure **this present darkness** (Eph 6:12, ESV) & know its dangers, we do so having already tasted Jesus' decisive act of deliverance as He sought us, ransomed us, & saved us who were lost in darkness. The Father **rescued us from the domain of darkness, & transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son** (Col 1:13). Amen? *Rescued*, past tense. It is done. **God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ** (2 Cor 4:6). Just as God spoke light into the dark at creation, so too has He spoken light into our dark souls as new creations in His Son. Our eyes have been opened to see the light of Jesus. The kingdom-transfer has occurred & we've gone from darkness to light. & so, as Peter says, we **proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light** (1 Pt 2:9). Once darkness. Now light. **For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord** (Eph 5:8). Through the darkness of Jesus' death, we see the Light of the world. Jesus' purpose for coming to this earth was to give us light, spiritual life. Jesus was God's plan of bringing light to this world. Jesus is the light of the world. He was sent for us as a love gift from God. The good news of Christmas is that Jesus came to earth to give us light so that we wouldn't wander hopelessly in the darkness. **I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness** (Jn 12:46). Jesus shines brightly like a brilliantly burning candle in a deeply dark room. The darkness has nowhere to hide from His luminous light. & if you follow Jesus as the light by faith, He will remove you from the kingdom of darkness & shine forth His light in your formerly darkened heart. The miracle of Christmas is God breaking through our deep darkness of suffering, sin, & death with the light of His Son. The light that breaks into that darkness symbolizes the coming of the Savior who will deliver all who put their faith in Him. Just as the 1st light of morning brings the promise of day, the coming of Jesus brings the promise of life & joy. By entering this world, He could live in this world & die for this world. He could live a perfect life & die an atoning death. He could do for us what we could never do for ourselves. He could deliver us from death & bring us to life eternal. God not only brings His light to us, but He makes us lamps of His light for others. As Jesus said to Paul, **I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light & from the**

dominion of Satan to God (Acts 26:17-18). He calls us **sons of light & sons of day**. **We are not of night nor of darkness** (1 Thes 5:5) & calls us to be **a light to those who are in darkness** (Rom 2:19). He is the Light of the world & the candles we are about to light represent His light spreading through the dark world we live in. Jesus, the light of God, invades our darkness. He comes to deliver us from our sin & darkness. On the cross He demonstrates His great love for us in saving us & paying the price for our deliverance & forgiveness. Jesus is **the Light of life** (Jn 8:12) & the *life of light* (Jn 1:4). He is **the way** & shows us the way to go; He is **the truth** & reveals the truth of our spiritual surroundings; & He is **the life** & gives us life. He's the light from which we derive our very life (Jn 14:6). & in His light, we not only see light, we become **light in the Lord** (Eph 5:8) & therefore become ourselves **the light of the world** (Mt 5:14). LIGHT CANDLES

As the light of our candles makes it through the room, think of this: The Infinite became finite, the Immortal became mortal, the Creator became a single cell. The Supernatural became natural. The Invulnerable became vulnerable. The holy One became something Mary could hold & hug. The impossible became possible. Jesus became fragile. God became breakable. The fullness of deity took up residence in the body of a Baby. The One who is the Word lay silent, unable to utter a word. On a dark night the Light arrived. He came by choice & with the sole intention of redeeming us through His perfect obedience, His atoning death, & His victorious resurrection. The Baby of the manger was the One nailed to a cross. The God who laid Himself in Mary's lap also placed Himself in the hands of Roman soldiers. The God who humbled Himself to become an infant, went willingly to His death on the cross. The Light hung on the cross in darkness. The living One died. When you see Jesus dying, what do you see? You see the light of God reaching out to you. He's doing this to pay for your sin. Christmas tells us we can never get to heaven; heaven had to come to us. & so it did in Jesus. He came from the bosom of the Father to the bosom of a woman. He became the Son of Man that we might become sons of God. He was born contrary to the laws of nature, lived in poverty, & was reared in obscurity. He had no wealth or influence & had neither training nor education in the world's schools. His relatives were unremarkable. In infancy He startled a king. In boyhood He puzzled the professors. In manhood He ruled the course of nature. He never wrote a

book & yet all the libraries of the world can't hold what has been written about Him. He never composed a song, yet He's furnished the theme for more songs than all songwriters together. He never founded a college, yet all the schools together cannot boast of as many students as He has. He never practiced medicine & yet He has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors have healed broken bodies. Jesus is the Light of astronomy, the Rock of geology, the Lion & the Lamb of zoology, the Harmonizer of all discords, & the Healer of all diseases. Throughout history great men have come & gone, yet He lives on. Herod couldn't kill Him. Satan couldn't seduce Him. Death couldn't destroy Him & the grave couldn't hold Him.⁸ He is the Light of the world. He is the Savior of the world, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, meaning anyone who trusts Him is freed from darkness to enjoy life in His spiritual light. He came to seek & save that which was lost, to give spiritual sight to the blind & spiritual life to the dead. Think of the hope & help we have to share with others about Jesus. The shocking reality of the Bible is that the God who must justly punish sinners also had a plan to pay that price for all who would trust Him. That's the Good News we must share. If you're resisting Jesus' light & clinging to your dark sins, let me urge you to gaze upon the loving Savior. He could have tormented your soul forever after your 1st sin, but He came as a Light to darkness & as a Savior for sinners. Why would you neglect such a gracious offer by your loving Creator? If you are not yet a believer, do you recognize what you're missing by remaining outside Christ's light? Only by receiving Jesus as your Lord & Savior can you be assured of God's tender care, an eternal hope of glory, & the great privilege of coming into your Father's presence forever.⁹ & for you who truly know the Light of Jesus, look at Him again & rekindle your devotion to this gracious Rescuer of your soul. Let the Light of the world shine into your hearts so you no longer remain in darkness & will never walk in darkness again but have the light of life. As you go from here into all the celebrations of the season, don't miss the why of Christmas. Jesus came as light. May the Light of Life pierce the darkness in your heart. He came **as Light into the**

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Hebrews*, pp 9–10

⁹ Daniel M. Doriani, Philip Graham Ryken, & Richard D. Phillips, *The Incarnation in the Gospels*, p 169

world, so that everyone who believes in Him will not remain in darkness (Jn 12:46). & so, may the light of Jesus chase away the dark shadow of sin's curse for everyone here.

The original Christmas light isn't Edison's bulb or even the candles Luther put on his Christmas tree. No, the 1st Christmas light was a Baby born in Bethlehem. It is a Light that was promised centuries earlier & a Light that continues to shine 2,000 years later. He is a Light for you & for me, & for all of us to celebrate today & every day. May you know that the Light has come into the darkness & that the darkness has not, will not, & cannot overcome it. Jesus has been born FOR YOU! Have you believed in Him & come out of the darkness into His blessed light?