

The Season for Lights and The Light

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It's the season for lights. Christmas trees sparkle and menorah candles burn bright. (We won't call them "holiday trees" or "festival candlesticks" here.) My family enjoys taking rides around town to see the lights and decorations; maybe you do that, too. It's the season for lights.

The prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament of the Bible proclaimed the good news: *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... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

In the first chapter of the New Testament Gospel of John, we read this about Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy: *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John [the Baptist]. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

It's the season for lights, but I hope and pray we are not so dazzled by the lights around us that we forget about The Light behind it all. Christmas parties are fun and the concerts are wonderful and the decorations are beautiful and the gifts are great, but it is a terrible thing to be so wrapped up with the gifts that we ignore The Gift. It is a tragic thing to enjoy the dawn so much that The Light becomes an afterthought. It is not a good thing to focus on the holiday and forget the holy day. It's the season for lights because of The Light. Jesus tells us this about himself in John 8:12 – *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Later, in John 12:46, he said this: *"I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."*

When the Apostle Peter wrote to believers in Jesus, he called them *"a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). The Apostle Paul tells the great news when he wrote: *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* (2 Corinthians 4:6). It is no wonder, then, that Paul also wrote: *"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"* (2 Corinthians 9:15)

It's the season for lights, the season for gifts, the season for celebrating. I hope all of us aim to celebrate The Light, who is The Gift. Merry Christmas!

(By the way, the church of which I am a pastor looks forward to both the Christmas Eve candlelight service and the morning worship service on Christmas Day. If you're looking for a place to remember and to celebrate The Light this Christmas, or if your church has decided not to have a Sunday service Christmas morning, you would be welcome to "meet me at the manger" at First Baptist in Sturgeon Bay.)

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Bible verses are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) and Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV).