A Great Light

Euan MacRae 15 December 2021



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Every year an age-old debate makes its way to the forefront of dinner table talk in Christian homes all over the world. Christmas – should we or shouldn’t we? It is all too easy to get drawn into fruitless conversations that generally lead to further division, frustration and judgment. The point of this article isn’t to add further fuel to an already tired discussion.

Whatever your view of Christmas, December offers a unique opening for us to talk about the most important event in the history of mankind. Seven hundred years before the birth of the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah forecast the significance of Jesus’ life in a striking image: ‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone’ (Isaiah 9:2 ESV)

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The Absence of Light

What did Isaiah mean when he spoke of darkness? He used a specific multi-faceted word (Hebrew: choshek) to describe the experience of life without God. Darkness means to exist without sight, to dwell in a place of obscurity where we are unseen, overlooked, vulnerable and troubled by a sense of nagging insecurity, dread and terror. Darkness exists only where there is no presence of light.

If we look through the lens of Isaiah's prophecy at our contemporary society, we will quickly notice that darkness is very present in the lives of the masses. While we have become focused on a pandemic moving like a dark shadow across the nations, have we noticed the many lives cut off in the shadows of loneliness, anxiety, fear and sadness? The problem with darkness is that it cannot produce light. The nations need to experience the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, more than ever before.

A City of Light

For over a century, residents of a little town in Norway named Rjukan have been exploring various means of overcoming their greatest enemy. Darkness. From late September to the middle of March, Rjukan is covered by the shadow of its impressive mountain range. The sleepy little town spends nearly seven months of every year shrouded in darkness. Residents commonly report battles with winter depression caused by the lack of sunlight.

In 2013, a series of mirrors were erected 2,500 feet above the town. The mirrors reflect the sunlight down into the town, bringing light to the heart of Rjunak throughout the cold, dark winter months. Rjunak is now famed throughout Norway as the "city of light". Not only are the residents engulfed in light, but tourists now flock from all over the nation to visit the town that came out of the darkness.

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Living in the Shadow of Darkness

For centuries, the issue of darkness has plagued the hearts of men, women and children in every nation of the world. This darkness has a common cause that exists in every human being, even from the point of birth – it is called sin. Perhaps for some, sin is a word that feels old fashioned, belonging to another era, but the fact remains that sin is the substance that creates spiritual

darkness in our lives. Sin is the indelible stain that imprisons our hearts and separates us from the light. Sin is the great leveler of mankind, common to all, sometimes expressed through physical actions, sometimes through our speech, and daily in our thought processes.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus, reminds us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23 (ESV, own emphasis added). Effectively, Paul confirms that sin anchors us in darkness and causes us to be unable to reach the light, the glory of God's presence, unless the tie to sin can be severed.

Herein lies the problem: unlike the residents of Rjunak, the darkness that covers our hearts has lulled people to sleep like a satanic lullaby. While the church waits for the tidal wave of revival to sweep the lost souls of many nations through her doors, the enemy watches contentedly, knowing that attractive as light is, darkness also powerfully appeals to those who enjoy its cover.

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Jesus, having delivered the most glorious solution to the problem of darkness in the famous words of John 3:16, immediately reminds us that, while it is true that everyone who chooses to believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life, those who live under the shadow of darkness will not always readily make their way into the light, 'This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.' (John 3:19-20 NIV)

Rjunak waited centuries for the curse of darkness to break. That darkness remained steadfast until the light came to visit. As we have established, darkness simply cannot produce light – light must come to darkness.

A Light in the Darkness

Whatever our view of Christmas, its timing and its traditions, it is surely a reminder that just as a group of unsuspecting shepherds watched over their flocks under the cover of darkness and were confronted by the glorious splendour and light of the angelic host, so today those overshadowed by darkness need to hear the same astounding message of love and peace. The message, though the same, will not be heralded by Gabriel – the message has a new voice: the Church of Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:14 (NIV) reminds us that the light must go to the darkness: 'How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not

heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?'

The same is true for us today. **How will darkness ever produce light if we do not take the light of Jesus into the world?** Jesus has commanded us to let our light shine before others so that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in Heaven.

Let Your Light Shine

So how do we **S.H.I.N.E** this Christmas time?

S – Serve Others

Christmas is a wonderful time to kick back, relax and be swept along in the atmosphere of film, food and fun. Certainly, we need rest. It is, however, vital that we do not switch off. If Christmas reminds us of anything, it is surely that 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many..' (Matthew 20:28 ESV)

December has the potential to be the most self-orientated month of the year as we focus on our families, our comfort, lavish gifts and the inordinate consumption of food. But there are some who desperately need friendship and love. Shine by serving others.

H – Hospitality

The Christmas message reminds us that when Jesus came to dwell amongst us, there was no room to accommodate Him; every inn was full, every bed was occupied. Often the Christmas season is marked by families hibernating within the four walls of their homes, but at a time when many are isolated and lonely, can we make space at our tables? Can we love Jesus by caring for others? We are encouraged to 'share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality..' (Romans 12:13, NIV)

Biblical hospitality means to show love to strangers! Who can we open our homes to over the festive season?

I – Invite

If the Father had not sent His son Jesus, the Light of the World, into the world, we would still be confined to darkness. Light must come to the darkness.

Christmas offers wonderful opportunities to invite our friends to experience the light of Jesus. It may be an outreach event, a Christmas service, a party or a meal, don't wait for a friend to miraculously come to Jesus; bring them to Him! 'Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.."' (Luke 14:23

NIV)

N – Nurture Friendships

Christmas is often described as ‘the season of goodwill’. This sentiment stems from the words spoken by the angel to the shepherds, but it was not seasonal goodwill or a temporary moment of favour but rather the announcement of eternal peace. Christmas is a reminder that the peace and friendship of God are permanent to those who love Him. As we build friendships, let us not just pretend to love others. Let’s really love them (Romans 12:9).

E – Evangelise

Christmas reminds us that God’s great desire is that we know Him and make Him known. We are God’s mirrors on earth, reflecting light into our dark world. ‘We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.’ (2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV)

God announced the coming of the Saviour through an angel to a group of shepherds watching their flocks. He now makes the same announcement, but not through an angel. **You** are now His herald. So go, tell the world that the Saviour is here!

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