

# Light for the Blind

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Christmas Eve

**Sermon Series: The  
Difference Jesus  
Makes**

John 8:12

***“I am the light  
of the world.  
Whoever  
follows me will  
never walk in  
darkness, but  
will have the  
light of life.”***

- John 8:12

**L**et me address those who are visitors to our church. You may be newcomers to the Christian faith. You may have been invited by someone who is active here. You may be family members visiting from out of town.

Allow me to start at the very beginning. What, after all, are we doing here? We are celebrating Christmas, of course. Christmas is an old English word which literally means “Christ’s festival.” Christmas is a festival celebrating God’s visitation to earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

The adjective “merry” that often accompanies Christmas refers to something pleasing and delightful, rather than any merriment generated from spiked punch bowls at holiday parties. Merry Christmas first appears in a letter written by an English admiral in the late 17th century. Merry Christmas gained enormous popularity in Charles Dickens’ legendary play *A Christmas Carol*.

Merry Christmas has fallen out of favor in our secular culture, supplanted by more generic expressions of “Happy Holidays” or “Season’s Greetings.” But, of late, the backlash against the phrase is beginning to take effect. Stores are referencing Christmas again in their displays. Even the Holiday Tree at the U.S. Capitol

has been called the National Christmas Tree again.

This church unapologetically and enthusiastically embraces the words Merry Christmas! May this festival celebrating God’s coming in Jesus Christ bring you supreme delight and sublime joy.

December 25 is the traditional date of Jesus’ birthday, although the Eastern Orthodox Church observes Christmas on January 6. No one knows for certain which day Jesus was born. The gospel writers are silent about the actual date of Jesus’ birth. Christmas on December 25 first appeared in the 4th century, for reasons to be enumerated a few moments from now.

Our church has been focusing on Jesus’ seven “I am” statements from John’s gospel this Christmas season. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (6:35), “I am the gate of the sheep” (10:7), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way, the truth and the life” (14:6) and “I am the true vine” (15:1). Tonight, our focus is Jesus’ words, “I am the light of the world” (8:12).

Three principles emerge from this verse: the metaphor of light, the claim of Jesus, and Jesus’ call to discipleship.

First, let’s explore the metaphor of light. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12).

## ***Light dispels darkness.***

The sun serves as our source of light. We also derive energy and heat from this exceptionally stable star. It intrigues me that the sun is the perfect age, perfect brightness, perfect distance, perfect size and perfect temperature to sustain life on earth.

Every living creature requires light to sustain life. Light enables photosynthesis to take place in plants, which fuels animal and human life. Sunlight serves as a valuable source of Vitamin D. Ultraviolet light from the sun converts cholesterol in our bodies into Vitamin D, so essential for producing calcium necessary in bone development.

Sunlight also helps regulate our body's biological clocks. Diminished daylight produces a chemical change in our bodies that researchers still don't understand. Contrast how you felt in Friday's rain and gloom alongside today's glorious sunshine. Some of you know first hand the debilitating affects of Seasonal Affective Disorder.

God's first act of creation was making light. God's first recorded words in the Bible are these: "Let there be light and there was light. And God saw that the light was good and separated the light from the darkness" (1:3-4).

I was raised in the country, far away from the glare of city street lights. There were no housing developments on the farm where I lived. It's dark in the country, really dark, especially on nights bereft of moonlight. Some nights I couldn't see the hand in front of my face. My dad rigged flood-

lights that were sensitive to motion. Since the garage was situated some distance from the house, we would walk in total darkness to the house. Suddenly, our motion triggered the light. The effect of light was dramatic. Before, we were surrounded in darkness. Then, instantly, we were bathed with light.

When my kids were young and became afraid of the dark, the instant remedy was to turn on the light. We would look under the bed and in the closet to reassure them there was no boogie man hiding there.

In 2003, Scott Hoch was playing golf in the Ford Championship at Doral in Miami, Florida. He was tied at the end of regulation play with Jim Furyk, and was playing the second playoff hole. He had to sink a nine foot birdie putt to remain tied for the lead. Scott was unsure of the lay of the green. In the evening dusk, he thought the putt broke left, while his caddy saw it the other way. Scott had reason to doubt what his eyes were telling him after five eye operations. The winning putt was worth \$900,000, so Scott refused to putt in the twilight. Jim Furyk declined as well, much to the dismay of the gallery. So, play resumed the next morning. As it turned out, the morning light proved his caddy right. Scott sunk the putt and went on to win the next hole and the championship. Light dispels darkness.

So much for the metaphor of light; let's move on to Jesus' claim, "I am the light of the world." John tells us later in the chapter that no one seized Jesus (8:21). What

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would possess people to arrest Jesus for saying “I am the light of the world?”

We learned earlier that people are gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles (7:2). This festival commemorated God’s deliverance of his people in their 40-year sojourn in the wilderness. Light was a dominant symbol in the Feast of Tabernacles. Every night for seven nights, four enormous candelabra were lit. They were so large, they required ladders to light them. Since these candelabra were displayed in the temple courtyard, they would illumine large sections of Jerusalem. The light served to remind God’s people of the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night with which God guided His people (Exodus 13:21).

On the last night of the festival (7:37), Jesus took his place before these blazing candelabras to announce, “I am the light of the world.” He didn’t merely say “I am the light of Jerusalem,” he said “I am the light of the world.”

I said earlier, that Christians in the 4th century settled on December 25 to commemorate Christmas. In Caesar’s day, December 25 was the traditional date of the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year. (In the modern era our Winter Solstice falls on December 21-22). The Romans celebrated the Winter Solstice on December 25 with a festival called *Sol Invictus* or the Festival of the Unconquered Sun. It was the day when the sun proved itself

unconquerable. The Festival of *Sol Invictus* celebrated the fact that the sun will eventually win the battle of day and night. Despite the prominence of darkness, the sun will not be denied. Every day the sun will remain in the sky longer until it achieves its summer solstice in mid-June.

Some Christians object to Christmas being celebrated on the same day as the pagan Festival of *Sol Invictus*. Wiccan and other pagan religions accuse Christians of hijacking their special day. But to early Christians, what better time to celebrate the coming of the true unconquerable Son—that’s S-O-N Son. Christians utilize the time when earth is darkest to celebrate the coming of the light of the world, the true unconquerable Son.

We have focused thus far on the metaphor of light as essential for life. We’ve considered the claim of the true unconquerable Son, “I am the light of the world.” What remains is Jesus’ call to “follow me.” “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” “Whoever” is the emphatic form of “who.” “Whoever” means “no matter who.”

Where exactly is Jesus taking us? He’s taking us out of darkness and into the light. Will we have to wear crosses or carry Bibles or tell people about it? Let me repeat what Jesus said. “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.”

His light can illumine our life. His light can guide us. His light

***“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark, the real tragedy of life is when people are afraid of the light.”***

- Plato

enables us to see things for what they really are.

His light will also expose the darkness. His light brings darkness to light. He illumines our dark places. Maybe that’s why people aren’t running to His light, but are fleeing it. Perhaps that explains why people could look Jesus square in the eye and not allow a single ray to penetrate their hearts. Why? They don’t want Jesus to expose their darkness.

Some of us are living in darkness. We are trying to hide it from our family and friends. Some of us are even hiding the darkness from ourselves.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that Christ’s coming is not only a matter of glad tidings, but first is “frightening news for everyone who has a conscience.”

People are not only afraid of the dark. I tell you, we’re afraid of the light! Plato once said, “We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark, the real tragedy of life is when people are afraid of the light.”

Maybe tonight some of you are hearing Jesus’ call to “follow me.” You are ready to follow; beyond tonight, of course. Beyond flimsy New Year’s resolutions, you are ready to explore what “follow me” really means.

If so, you’re in good company. We are a community of believers committed to disciple-making. We want to become disciples and make disciples. We are learning our whole lives what it means to follow Jesus.

Some of us, you’ll need to excuse us, we’re just beginning. There are dark places in our lives that have not yet been exposed to the light of Christ.

Some of you may be hearing his call “follow me.” So come and follow!

