



Christmas Light

"In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

By Mike Feazell

Brilliant displays of light and color are part and parcel with the Advent season. For some people, such displays may be little more than another advertising gimmick of modern retailers. But for believers, they can be another reminder of the glory of the One and Only Son of God, the light of the world, who brings the peace and rest for which the whole world aches and pines.

In the days when Jesus was born in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago, there was a devout old man called Simeon living in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

One day the Spirit led Simeon into the temple courts—the very day that Jesus' parents brought in the infant Jesus to fulfill the requirements of Torah.

When Simeon saw the baby, he took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

Light to the Gentiles

Simeon praised God for what the scribes, the Pharisees, the chief priests and the teachers of the law could not comprehend: Israel's Messiah was not for the salvation of Israel only, but also for the salvation of all peoples of the world.

Isaiah had prophesied it long before: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6; cf. 42:6-7).

Jesus: the new Israel

The Israelites were the people of God. God had called them out from among the nations and set them apart through a covenant as his own special people. And he did it not merely for them, but for the eventual salvation of all nations (Isaiah 49:6).

Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles, but their light had gone out. They had failed to keep the covenant. But God is faithful to his covenant regardless of the faithlessness of his covenant people (Romans 3:3-4).

So, in the fullness of times, God sent his own Son to be the light of the world. He was the perfect Israelite, who perfectly kept the covenant as the new Israel (Romans 5:18-26). As the prophesied Messiah, the

perfect representative of the covenant people and the true light to the Gentiles, Jesus delivered both Israel and the nations from sin and reconciled them to God.

Through faith in Christ, giving our allegiance to him and becoming identified with him, we become members of the faithful covenant community, the people of God (Romans 3:27-30).

Righteous in Christ

We cannot muster righteousness on our own. Only as we are identified with Christ the Savior are we counted as righteous.

We are sinners, no more righteous in ourselves than Israel was. Only when we see our sinfulness and put our faith in the One through whom God justifies the wicked can we be counted as righteous for his sake (Romans 4:16, 22-25).

The church needs the grace of God as much as Israel does. All who put their faith in Christ, Gentile and Jew alike, are saved only because *God* is faithful and good, not because we have been faithful, or because we have found some secret formula, some “right” doctrine or the “right” church.

“He has rescued us,” Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13, “from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Trust in Jesus

As easy as it might sound, it is hard to trust in Jesus. Trusting in Jesus means putting your life in his hands, and that means giving up control over your life.

That is not easy to do. We like to be in control of our own lives. We like to call the shots, make our own decisions and do things our own way.

King Ahaz of Judah was no exception. Ahaz rejected the sign God gave him for deliverance, for salvation, for peace. He had his own plans about how to best save the nation (Isaiah 7:1-17).

God has a long-range plan for our deliverance and security, and he has a short-range plan. But, like Ahaz, we cannot receive the fruit of his plans if we do not stand firm in faith.

Some people, like King Ahaz, stand firm in military might. Others stand firm in financial security, in their personal integrity or their personal reputation. Some stand firm in their skill or their strength, their ingenuity, deal-making or intelligence.

None of these things is bad or sinful in themselves, of course. But as humans we are inclined to put our confidence, energy and devotion into them instead of in the real source of security and safety and peace.

Walking humbly

When we commit to God our problems, along with the positive action we take in dealing with them, and trust in his care, provision and deliverance, he promises to be with us.

James wrote, “Humble yourselves before the Lord” (James 4:10). God calls us to put aside our lifelong crusade to defend ourselves, promote ourselves, preserve our possessions, protect our reputations and prolong our lives. God is our provider, our defender, our hope and our destiny.

The illusion that we can get our own lives under control must be exposed to the light, to Jesus, “the light of the world” (John 8:12). Then we can rise in him, becoming who we really are—God’s own precious children whom he saves and helps, whose battles he fights, whose fears he calms, whose pain he shares, whose future he secures and whose reputation he preserves.

“If we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

In giving up all, we gain everything. In kneeling, we rise. In setting aside our illusion of personal control, we are clothed with all the glory and splendor and riches of the heavenly eternal realm.

“In these decorative lights we can enjoy a dim reflection of the true light, Jesus Christ.”

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you,” Peter wrote (1 Peter 5:7). What oppresses you? Your sins? An enemy? A financial disaster? A crushing disease? An inconceivable loss? An impossible situation that you are utterly helpless to do anything about? A disastrous and painful relationship? A blackening of your name? False accusations?

God has sent his Son, and through his Son, he takes our hands and lifts us up and shines the light of his glory into the dark and painful crisis we are enduring. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we are not afraid, because he is with us.

God has given us the sign that his rescue is certain: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Everywhere we look during this season, it seems, there is decorative lighting—white lights and colored lights and lit candles. In these physical lights we can enjoy a dim reflection of “the true light that gives light to every man” (John 1:9). ●