

John 1.1-9

Concerning the Light

SWCOB 11.29.09

Today is the first Sunday of Advent.

It is also the end of Thanksgiving week.

We're not sure if we should be thinking Thanksgiving today,  
Or looking ahead and thinking about Christmas.

I'm reminded of a story from Van Morris.

“An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says,  
‘I hate to ruin your holidays,  
But I have to tell you that your mom and I are divorcing—  
45 years of misery is enough.’

‘Pop, what are you talking about?’ the son asks.

‘We can't stand the sight of each other any longer,’  
the old man says.

‘We’re sick of each other,  
And I’m sick of talking about it,  
So you call your sister in Chicago and tell her.’

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone,  
‘No way are they getting a divorce!’ she shouts,  
‘I’ll take care of this.’

She calls Phoenix immediately and screams at her father,  
‘You are NOT getting a divorce.  
Don’t do a single thing till I get there.

I’m calling my brother back,  
And we’ll both be there tomorrow.

Until then, don’t do a thing!’

The old man hangs up the phone and turns to his wife.

‘Okay,’ he says, ‘They’re coming for Thanksgiving,  
And paying their own fares.

Now, how do we get them here for Christmas!’”

~

Biblical scholars really don’t know when Jesus was born.

Most would agree that he was not born on,

December 25, 0000.

The month is unlikely,

The day is unlikely,

And the year is unlikely.

I hope this information won't detract from the Spirit of Christmas.

Most scholars take a calculated guess,

And suggest that Jesus was born somewhere,

Between the years of seven BC to four BC.

Scripture states that Jesus was born during King Herod's reign.

Historians, however, know that King Herod died in 4 BC.

That would have put the birth of Christ,

At 4 BC or earlier.

A sixth century monk, by the name of Dionysius Exiguus,

Developed the calendar that we use today.

He is the one attributed with estimating the year of Jesus' birth,

As we know it.

He based his calculations of Jesus' birth,

On Luke's references in Luke 3.1 and 23;

That Jesus began his ministry when he was about thirty

In the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius.

Dionysius decided to designate that year,

As the 30<sup>th</sup> "year of our Lord," A.D.

Or anno Domini in Latin.

Dionysius then subtracted to come up with the date of Jesus' birth.

In fact, using his calendar,

Everything was and is now calculated,

According to his B.C. and A.D.

However, the Luke text refers to Jesus beginning his ministry,

When he was *about* thirty,

And of course about thirty can vary three to four years.

So you can see the problem of trying to figure,

Just exactly what year Jesus was born.

And so placing the birth at 0000,  
Was as good a calculated guess as any.

As far as figuring out what month and day Jesus was born,  
This was not an educated guess at all.

People just had no idea what month and day Jesus was born.  
It was really anybody's guess.

And so the Romans, who by now,  
In the sixth century AD,  
Considered themselves a Christian nation,

Decided to celebrate the birth of Jesus,  
On the shortest day of the year.

According to their early scientific calculations,  
The shortest day of the year was December 25.  
Not bad! They were only four days off.

The shortest day of the year as we know it, is December 21,  
The winter solstice.

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Why do you suppose the Romans selected,  
The shortest day of the year,  
For the birth of Jesus to take place?

Because many passages in the Bible refer to the coming Messiah,  
As light that will come and shine in the darkness.

And since the end of December is the darkest time of the year,  
What better time to have the light come?

Isaiah 60.1-2

**Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
And the glory of the Lord rises upon you.**

**See, darkness covers the earth,  
And thick darkness is over the peoples,  
But the Lord rises upon you,  
And his glory appears over you.**

~~

It seems right then,  
Not knowing when Jesus was born,  
To place his birth,

During the darkest time of the year.

A time where the light is weak and the soul is dark.

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Today's reading from John 1:1-9,

Is John's account of the coming of Christ.

John uses three metaphors in describing Jesus.

He begins with describing Jesus as the Word.

**Jesus was the Word, and the Word was with God and was God.**

The second metaphor John uses to describe Jesus is life.

**In him was life, and that life was the light of men.**

And the third metaphor John uses for Jesus is light.

**The light shines in the darkness.**

John the Baptist comes onto the scene as a witness.

**He himself was not the light;**

**He came only as a witness to the light.**

Jesus' coming brings light to a darkened world!

~~

For some the light of the Christmas Season is hard to find!

The Christmas Season can be a depressing time of year.

Some of this may be attributed to the actual shortage of sunlight,

Doctors call it S.A.D.;

Seasonal Affective Disorder.

Some depression may be due to high Christmas expectations.

We expect Christmas to be a light and delightful occasion,

And after it is all said and done its no fun at all.

For kids, Christmas is a blast, but many adults struggle with it.

Even before Thanksgiving,

Jude and I were at Younkers in the Mall,

And I overheard two women talking.

The first one said to the other,

“Have you started your Holiday season yet?”

“Yes,” the other said, “Today,

And, boy, do I have a splitting headache!”

The hype and hoopla of Christmas,  
The stress and busyness of the season,  
The hopes of great Christmas gifts,

All can attribute to depression.

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Some depression is also due to false hope.

Hope that if we really get into Christmas this year,  
If we go all out and really buy really nice gifts,  
Then the light of Christmas will shine for us.

But more often than not,  
We somehow feel let down after Christmas is over.

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It reminds me of Dave Barry's article on Christmas giving:

"Your standard man, at this point in the Christmas season,  
Has purchased zero gifts.

He has not yet gotten around to purchasing an acceptable gift

For his wife for last Christmas.

He did give her something last year,

But he could tell by her reaction to it,

That she had not been dreaming of getting an auto emergency kit,

Even though it was a deluxe model,

With booster cables and an air compressor.

Clearly, this gift violated an important rule,

But the man had no idea what the rule was,

And his wife was too upset to tell him”

(washintonpost.com).

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Something has gone wrong with Christmas.

Even with the Christmas lights up,

It sometimes seems hard to find the light of Christmas.

We spend too much time,

On the fluff of Christmas

And not enough time on the flint of Christmas.

For the true Christmas celebrations,  
Center around the fact that God has done a very great thing.

It is so astounding as to seem almost absurd.

God became a baby boy, born in a hay trough.

He grew up to be despised and rejected,

And he died to save us from our sins!

And he rose from the dead!

Preposterous!

Preposterous it may sound,

Incredible it may be,

Astounding it appears,

Unbelievable it seems,

It is, nevertheless, as the worn out cliché states,

“The reason for the Season.”

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I quote Rick Mylander,

“Have we reduced the stable scene

To some cutesy little scenario

That has no meaning left in it at all?

Have we lost the sense of awe that there,

In that stable, God became human?

What can be the point of Christmas,

If it is here and gone tomorrow?

For all our celebrations this time of year,

Why do so many fail to recognize Christmas's Lord?

The fact remains that our world,

Never comes as close,

To being in contact with its greatest hope and joy,

As it does at Christmas!"

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What is it in our Christmas preparations that bring light,

To our darkened worlds?

How can we find the light of Christmas,

And have it light our lives throughout the year?

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The problem with Christmas is that we look for the light of Christ,

In all the wrong places.

We look for the light of Christmas,  
Under the Christmas tree,  
Or up the chimney, or under the mistletoe.

We look for the light of Christmas in the shopping malls,  
Or at Wal-mart or even on-line.

We look for the light of Christmas with eager anticipation,  
And when Christmas is over and done with,  
We become depressed because we have somehow missed it . . .

Not Christmas, but the light of it all.

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The season of Christmas is just that, seasonal.

It happens one month out of the year.

However, the birth of Christ is also eternal.

It is something we don't have to wait for.

It is historical because,

Jesus was born on a day somewhere around the year 0000.

It is spiritual because,  
Christ is constantly being born,  
In the hearts of new believers.

The light of the Christmas Season is the celebration,  
Of the historical birth of Christ,

But much more importantly,

The light of the Christmas Season is the celebration,  
Of the spiritual birth of Christ within us.

If we celebrate just the historical birth of Jesus,  
The light of Christmas is over as the season passes.

But if we celebrate the spiritual birth of Jesus,  
The light of Christmas stays with us throughout eternity.

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Let's simplify Christmas!

Let's all just slow down a bit!

Don't let the pressure of "doing" Christmas,  
Snuff out the light of Christmas.

Don't let the trappings of Christmas,  
Cover the real celebration.

Don't let the spirit of Christmas,  
The good will and peace on earth,  
Be only a temporal and temporary experience.

It is the eternal light of Immanuel, God with us,  
That we should be celebrating!

And we celebrate it with our hearts not our pocketbooks!

Instead,

    Come away with me to a quieter place!

Come to Bethlehem,

Come with me to a stable,

Come look in on a sight to behold.

For the Son of God lies in a manger,

Surrounded by the peaceful sounds and smells,

Of the animals and hay.

Come with me and peer over the shoulders,

Of the shepherds,

And see the child wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Come with me and look upon sweet Mary,

As she looks down upon her son with such tenderness.

Come with me and see Joseph sitting in hushed silence,

Pondering the miracle before him.

Leave the hustle and bustle of the Christmas shopping season,

And set aside time to listen once again to the Story,

The greatest Story ever told.

Celebrate in carols as we share the light of Christmas.

Help recreate the Nativity scene like we imagine it to be.

Gather with your church family and tell the story.

Tell the story of a sleepy little town called Bethlehem,

And the birth of a child that forever changed the world.

For that is where the light of Christmas is found,

And that is where you'll find the true Spirit of Christmas.

**The people living in darkness have seen a great light;**

**On those living in the land of the shadow of death**

**A light has dawned (Mt. 4.16). I pray so.**