

“The Light, Love, Compassion, and Grace of God.”

LUKE 2:1-7, LUKE 2:8-20

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Thou shalt know God when Jesus comes
Not by any din of drums,
Nor by the vantage of Jesus airs,
Nor by anything Jesus wears,
Neither by Jesus gown,
Nor Jesus crown.
For God's presence known shall be
By the holy harmony
That God's coming makes in thee.

Frederick Buechner observes, “The whole world stops on Christmas Eve, to listen to a story it already knows; believers and nonbelievers alike listen to the most important story in the world.” It is a dark messy story. The dark messiness of an unplanned pregnancy with two families trying to figure out how to handle the pregnancy in a time when it was viewed as a mortal sin to be punished by Mary being stoned to death. The mess of a hurry up wedding and then just as Mary and Joseph are about to settle into their home, a census requiring a 90 mile, six day journey. Mary nine months pregnant walking and riding a donkey. The mess of a small town flooded with unhappy people, forced to travel against their will, to be counted by the oppressive emperor. The mess of labor and birth in a dreary stable. The dark terror of Herod slaughtering all the children less than two years of age because he felt threatened. The dark mess of the entire region devastated by the senseless violence, agonized by grief. The dark mess of Mary, Joseph and Jesus hiding, fleeing, taking exile in Egypt.

Pastor John Buchanan observes. “The story is as messy as human life itself. That is precisely what we love so much about the story. We know this story; we understand this story, at a level in us deeper than our intellects, our rational, scientific reason. We know and understand this story in our hearts.”

Scripture declares **Isaiah 9:1 & 2 (NLT, MSG, NIV)** “Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light—a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow. On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned! Sunburst of light!” **John 1:5, 9 (NLT, MSG, NIV)** “Jesus, the light, shines through

the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish the light. Jesus gives light to everyone. Jesus, the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory full of grace and truth, full of unfailing love and faithfulness. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness could not put the light out.” The word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

There is a lot about the Christmas story that I do not like, it makes me angry at God. Since God is all loving and all powerful. Why the mess? Why all the darkness? I want the scripture to declare the light shines and totally, immediately, overcomes all the darkness. Why can't the darkness be obliterated? Why was life so dark and messy for Mary and Joseph? The small, normally safe, town of Bethlehem after celebrating the light of Jesus birth wailed in horror as a fearful person slaughtered their children. Yet somehow the grief of all those funerals did not overcome the light, nor did the beheading of Jesus friend, John, nor all the disease, suffering, hatred and fear, not even Jesus crucifixion. **John 1:5 “Jesus, the light, shines through the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish the light.”** While I do not like that the darkness is not total overcome certainly this scripture is true. We still struggle with darkness, deep darkness, from the dark headlines around the world to the darkness experienced by our family and friends, to our own personal darkness. I do not know why God does not immediately get rid of all the darkness. Perhaps it has something to do with honoring free will. Maybe we experience deeper love through the healing and illumination of God. Perhaps to immediately disperse all darkness would fail to acknowledge our pain, our need for God's compassion to fully relate to us, renew us and wipe away every tear. We are in such deep darkness that we cannot fully envision the fullness of life, perfect love or the brilliance of complete light.

While it is true that we live in darkness the greater truth is the light shines through the darkness and darkness can never ever extinguish the light. Christmas is God entering into our darkness to be with us, to enlighten us. God loves you too much to be distant. God has too much compassion for you to stay safe in heaven. God climbed into the darkest places to be with us, to love you, help you, guide you, encourage you, heal you, renew you, invigorate you, resurrect you.

Pastor John Buchanan said. “The essence of Christmas is that God came to earth to be with us, to be as vulnerable and weak as any of us; came to earth to share and bless our humanness, all of it—our joys, our sadness, our ecstasy, our disappointment; came to be with us and redeem and make whole our humanness our suffering, our victories, our fears, our deaths. The love of God has been born among us and nothing can or will ever separate us from that love. Christmas means: that love will always, finally, utterly, triumph over hate; that the truth, always finally will overcome lies,” that perfect abundant eternal life will be established.

God is not afraid or worried about the darkness for God will overcome the darkness. Jesus encourages us to not be afraid, to not worry, to have hope inspired by the

light. Jesus has compassion for us. Jesus laments with us. Jesus grieves with us over every funeral, over every loss. Jesus cries a tear for every tear we shed. Jesus feels the pain of every darkness and shines light through the darkness. Jesus is working to complete every brokenness, heal every hurt, forgive every mistake and wipe away every tear to give us abundant life with perfect love and complete joy.

John 1:5 “Jesus, the light, shines through the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish the light.” Jesus life revealed the love, compassion and grace of God. Jesus healed people from physical disease, healed people from mental and emotional troubles. Jesus was gracious when people were brought to Jesus who were caught red handed and who sinned, Jesus forgave them and set them free. Jesus crossed every barrier to welcome people into community. Jesus healed the son of an enemy. Jesus ate meals with everybody including those labeled as nobodies. Jesus lifted children and women up as equals, hugging children, talking and listening to women. When people were alarmed that people were not celebrating the religious festivals Jesus went out, crossing the lines of religion and celebrated with the outsiders, the outcasts and nonbelievers. Jesus was concerned with the most mundane detail of each person’s daily life you could hear it in his fishing, farming, housecleaning, bread baking stories which all reveal another facet of the love, compassion and grace of God.

A lot of people some well meaning, and some not, tried to overcome the light of Jesus with darkness such as hate, fear, judgment, violence, twisted beliefs, yet Jesus will never be overcome by any form of darkness. Scripture declares **1 John 1:5 “God is light and in Jesus is no darkness at all.”** **John 1:5 “Jesus, the light, shines through the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish the light.”** **John 1:9 “Jesus gives light to everyone.”** Some how no matter how dark the situation, no matter how dark the person, the original covenant with Abraham and Sarah will be fulfilled. All people will be blessed. Jesus will enlighten everyone. Christmas tells of how the grace of God brings salvation to everyone.

The Christmas story is your personal story. It is the story of God coming to be with you always, God enlighten your darkness, God’s compassion healing every hurt, God’s grace perfecting every imperfection, God welcoming you into God’s family and God loving you always with a steadfast, everlasting love that will always shine through the darkness. The story of Christmas is God giving you an abundance of gifts, a multitude of blessings, including filling you with so much love that you can love, filling you with so much wonder that you can perceive the glory of God in bread and juice, carols, a candle, hugs, decorations and in every goodness in your life, filling you with so much light that you can shine, filling you with so much joy that you can rejoice. Amen