

Opening ILL: Phillips Brooks was burned out and exhausted from his ministry. He requested, and was granted, a sabbatical from his church, and took a trip to the Holy Land. On Christmas Eve in Jerusalem, he and some of his friends mounted horses and rode towards Bethlehem. He prayed and spent time alone with God. It lifted his spirits to be close to the place where Jesus was born. There was singing at the Church of the Nativity and he felt surrounded by the presence of God. Before dark he rode out to the field where the shepherds saw the angel on the night Jesus was born. He noticed that there were still shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. A few weeks later he returned from his sabbatical with renewed energy. He tried to explain how his life and been changed in Bethlehem but was unable to describe it to his church. 3 years later – at Christmas, he decided to sit down and write a poem about his experience in Bethlehem.

That poem was put to music and on Christmas morning 1868, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” was finished. It has become one of the most loved Christmas Carols. It’s the song of a pastor who experienced spiritual renewal.

O, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.

Yet in the dark street shineth, the everlasting light.

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight!

Spiritual Darkness seems to abound in our world today: evil acts of violence, self-abuse and abuse of others, hatred, greed, and selfishness. The streets are dark, but the darkness that we see reminds us of why the celebration of Christmas is so important to us. **“Yet in the dark street shineth, the everlasting light.”**

The Message of Christmas is all about the fact that God looked into a world that was full of darkness and shined an everlasting light.

Jesus the Light of Christmas

Matthew and Luke are the traditional Christmas stories that tell about Jesus’ birth, but the Gospel of John includes the story of Christmas too, but told in a different way.

It’s almost as if John wanted to tell you the point of Jesus’ coming rather than the story of how He came.

John 1:4-5 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. This life of Jesus brings light! ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Here is our hope that we celebrate this Christmas! Jesus is our light, the light of the world, and no matter how dark of a place we find ourselves in, when we choose to follow Jesus, we will NEVER walk in darkness. WE HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE! We CHOOSE Life and Light.

The Arrival of the Light

Luke 2:8-20 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

“Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Receive the Light

Luke 2:15-16 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

The everlasting light has shined in our darkness! The hopes and fears of all the shepherds were found in Jesus Christ. Therefore, they worshiped Him and received Him as the Messiah.

John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

Have you received the light of Jesus as well?

Shine the Light

Luke 2:17-18 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

The shepherds not only discovered and received the Light of Jesus, but they were compelled to make Him known to others in order that they may worship Him also.

- On that first Christmas night, the shepherds, the lowest of all professions, were the first to hear the message of the angel and the first to witness Jesus' birth.
- They were also the first ones given the responsibility to share the story of His birth with others.

They took their responsibility seriously and returned from the manger and spread the news of His birth to others. Somewhere along the way – the church has stopped passing on the good news of Jesus. Only 17% of Americans even go to church!

If the church would have been faithful in sharing the story of Jesus, the world would have been evangelized a long time ago.

We, like the shepherds, must receive the light of Jesus, worship Him, and share the Light with others.

This is their only hope! The world is living in darkness and despair, they need to know that the everlasting light has come! How can we receive the light and not share it with others?

Your friends, family, and neighbors who are struggling in darkness don't have to be.

If you Shine your light and help them receive Jesus the Light, their Christmas will be full of joy.

Isaiah 9:2-3 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before You as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils. (HCS)

Psalms 16:11 You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (NKJ)

Why would we keep the light from anyone that we love?

We need to share the light with them right away! We need to tell them, like Jesus told the woman at the well, your wait is over, you don't have to wait any longer.

John 4:25-26 (The Message Bible) The woman said, "I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story." ²⁶ "I am he," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."

We have a responsibility to worship God and to serve the world.

Isn't that what the shepherds did when they found Jesus?

Luke 2:17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about

Spread the word, go and tell somebody! Don't wait until you are totally together.

Go as one dirty grimy shepherd, who has seen the light, and share the good news with other dirty grimy shepherds.

Light Up the World!

"Give light, and the darkness will disappear of itself." Desiderius Erasmus

Light always dispels the darkness. You can't turn up the darkness; you can only turn down the light.

We are called to go in the dark places of this world and bring light into the darkness.

We are call to Light Up the World.

St. Augustine compared good and evil to light and darkness.

Darkness is only the absence of light.

So, evil is the absence of good just as darkness is the absence of light.

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

The Light is here. Jesus is light, and He has come to light up the world, but we are now the light carriers.

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Our Worship leads to Witness, and our Witness leads to Worship

God has called us out of the world to worship Him and then sent us back into the world to witness and to serve.

Luke 2:20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Without this balanced biblical understanding of our purpose and the purpose of the church, we will never fulfill our mission.

- The shepherds bowed down and worshiped Jesus at the manger.
- They returned and spread the word regarding what they had seen and heard.
- So that more would come and worship – and then go and witness!

It is a perpetual circle – worship/witness/worship/witness

This is the ongoing hope of Christmas! Not only that Jesus the Light has penetrated the darkness, but that through you and I the light continues to dispel the darkness in this world.

Yet in the dark street shineth, the everlasting light.

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight!

Next Life Step: List Four Friends in darkness that need the Light of Jesus.

Next Life Step: Pray daily for each of your four friends.

Next Life Step: Invite all Four Friends to The Light of Christmas (A Musical Drama and Worship Experience) Sunday, December 17, 2017 @ 9 am or 11 am

Life App Group and Family Devotional Application

1. Tell your own personal story of how and when you received the Light.
2. After receiving the Light, why do you think many Christians rarely spread the word about the Light?
3. What would result from your friends receiving the Light this Christmas? (Isaiah 9:2-3 / Psalms 16:11)
4. Explain the connection between Worship and Witness.