

Reading: Isaiah 9v1-7

Theme: Christ the Light of the world.

In our own area, in the main shopping areas, especially in the town centre there are many Christmas lights. Many people put them up in November - as they were fed up of being under Covid restrictions and did so to brighten up their lives and areas. There are lights in many windows of houses - in the windows or on Christmas trees placed near windows. Some decorated trees and other large plants in the gardens. Christmas is a time for lights.

The custom goes back to when Christmas trees were decorated with candles, which symbolized Christ being the light of the world – thought to be a custom adopted from pagan yule rituals celebrating the return of the light of the sun as the days grow longer - the evergreen trees symbolising the renewal and continuance of life in dark times. Christmas trees were brought by Christians into their homes in Germany between in 1600-1800s. For many years, those who could afford to would express their Christmas spirit by lighting candles on trees. “... *the tree was set up in the parlour and when all the family would come down to see the tree, dad or granddad would light up all the candles. You’d look at it for a few seconds and blow them out.*”

Obviously, candles are dangerous to use on trees as they dried out! Candles were eventually replaced with electric lights. The Christmas lights of today can light up trees and window frames with tiny twinkling led lights of many colours – as well as causing frustration with their long and tangle-prone cables. The first such lights, were introduced

in 1882 by Edward Johnson, a friend and partner of light-bulb inventor Thomas Edison.

In Isaiah 9v2 we read of people walking in darkness who saw a great light and those living in the shadow of death, a light has dawned on them. The Lord Jesus claimed to be the Light of the world (John 8:12) and as He usually did in John's gospel, He performed a miracle in John 9 that confirmed that - by healing a man born blind, who had been in total darkness all his life. We sing in the carol 'O little town of Bethlehem' *"yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."*

The idea of light and darkness is still relevant today. The Bible teaches that no matter the social conditions, or man's learning or education, or any pandemic - that all people are creatures of the darkness - there is no light in them. This is not saying people are as bad or evil as they could be, but that there is no light of God in them. Mankind is not only in darkness, but in regards to God, mankind is dark and we could never by searching find out God. Even as we go from this chaotic year and move on into 2021, no scientific rationale or development will ever allow us to find God.

This is one of the reasons Jesus was born into the world so long ago. As God, God in human flesh (incarnate), He is the Light of the world. It would appear that Jesus was born at night. This is a lovely picture of the spiritual Light of the world coming into this spiritually dark world. This morning for a short time, I want us to consider Christ as the Light (of

the world) and see what His coming into the world brings. I'm using the name CHRIST as an acrostic to help us remember the headings. So, Christ the Light of the world brings:

Comfort.

Surely, comfort is something we need for the year ahead - after the year we have had - with all its uncertainty over Covid, lockdowns etc. We might know a number of people, whether adults or children, who do not like the dark and have a real phobia about such. Shadows, noises, everyday objects are transformed to 1001 things to be feared or to dread! I wonder how many at different times and places, have been longing for night to end and the light to come. As dawn's first light creeps over the horizon, many situations have been changed from dreadful and fearful, to situations of comfort and security.

Great comfort came with the birth of the Jesus. Until then, mankind had been in the dark, even the Jewish nation with all their privileges of God's leading and care had only a partial light. When Jesus was born, a new era began and when the light was come, people had comfort who had walked, lived in darkness.

In the Christmas narrative, there is the account of Simeon in the temple, when he saw baby Jesus, he had great comfort as he was shown by God who the child was and he praised God, was ready to die at that very moment. The Light of the world, Jesus Christ, speaks of comfort, but also:

Hope.

We all have hopes and aspirations. I guess we would all hope that next year is going to be much, much better than this year for ourselves, families, friends and for all nations. The coming of light is comforting, but brings with it a message of hope also - life can continue, the danger is passing, that a rescue may be made. News bulletins, announcements may be made concerning looking for survivors, or lost climbers and they go something like this “*as night falls, hopes of finding them alive fades*”. Then the next morning, when it is light, the search restarts, hope revives if only they survived overnight.

Being lost in our darkness, not knowing where to go, we as mankind have groped for so long, but there is hope, for the Light of the world has come to show us the way and now there is hope for all those who are walking in darkness, for those living in the shadow of death - there is now a great light that has dawned upon this world. There is now hope for us all.

Revelation.

For many years, parents have told children not to read in low light, yet researchers have shown that children have the ability to see in low light levels much better than adults! How many times have we as children, or our children been caught reading in what seems darkness to adults! Yet when you put the light on, they and we can see very clearly, we have revealed to us a room and its contents. My old Sunday school teacher told us of a place he and his wife stayed at while attending the Aberystwyth Conference many years

before. They arrived at the hotel late - it was dark, windy and wet. They seemed to walk ages upstairs to get to their room. They had no view was far as they were concerned - just pitch darkness as they looked out of the windows. The next morning when they opened the curtains, their breath was taken away by the glorious views they had of the Welsh countryside and coastline!

The Light of the world, the Lord Jesus, was born in Bethlehem and He is the light to show us, to reveal to us God and the way to God. John says in the opening of his gospel of the Light the world: *“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14)

As we look at, consider, study Jesus, His claims about Himself and His life, we will see He shows, reveals to us what the Father is like - because Jesus is God, God the Son, He has all the attributes and characteristics of God and He shows us the Father. He not only shows us this in His life, but by His life, actions teaching, by the miracles He did, so the Light of the world gives us:

Instruction.

There are things we need to know, things that God would have us know, so that we do not continue in the darkness and ignorance of not knowing such things. Looking back, I feel sorry for my teachers at school as they had to teach me, especially my maths teacher who had to explain geometry to me! Yet they kept on until things became clear and I can

still, even today, confidently remember the difference between a circle and a square! It was hard work for them and me - but I wasn't really that bad a student!

The baby born in Bethlehem that first Christmas is the Lord Jesus and for the last 3 years of His life He began to openly teach of God, told how men, women, boys and girls could be right with God, Jesus spoke of the way to God, spoke of how we are to live lives in relation to God and one another. We are to walk in the light of His teaching, to accept His instruction and let Him, the Light, shine in and through our lives. Also, the Lord Jesus did not only come to teach us, or to be our example, but to bring:

Salvation.

Jesus came on a rescue mission. There was no one else who could come and successfully complete this rescue mission except Him. He had to be born of Mary, be born into this world and all this was planned, for it was a necessary part of the rescue mission to save us. As we noted a fortnight ago, this was foretold by prophets centuries before and was fulfilled in minute detail in Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. The angels knew that and they told the shepherds "*Today in the town of David a **Saviour** has been born to you, He is Christ the Lord.*" (Luke 2:11)

The angel told Joseph the baby was to be called Jesus - meaning "*the Lord our Salvation*" for "*He shall save His people from their sins.*" That idea, that notion of sin is laughed at by many today, considered a thing to be treated lightly. Yet with God, because He is holy; sin is not an

insignificant thing, but an infinite offence. Because we are in darkness and darkness in us, even our best actions, our most noble actions are polluted, stained with sin and offensive to God. We needed a way for the darkness to be removed from within us and us from it. The Light of the world came to achieve this, not only in His birth and life, but especially so in His death and resurrection. Jesus came to be the Saviour of all who will believe in Him and we see finally that Christ the Light of the world shows us:

Truth.

Perhaps I have said things that some watching or listening will want to question, think about or perhaps you may want to think or read more, then visit the church's website and on the home page you will find the **Find Hope** button link – to take you to a page with links to help you know more ; links to download electronic versions of the Bible, as well as links to help you read it and learn more about God and Jesus. I aim to preach, teach and apply what the Bible, God's word says and I do so as relevant for getting to know God and to grow in our relationship with Him through Jesus our Saviour.

The Lord Jesus came not only to be the Light, but to give us the comfort, hope, revelation, instruction regarding the truth of God and His way of salvation. God's word, the Bible, also teaches us how to go on with Jesus as our Saviour in our day-by-day life. Jesus said of Himself that He is the Truth - all He claimed for Himself, said of Himself and of God was and is true truth. God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119v106).

One such claim is recorded and can be found in John's gospel 8:12 *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* There is so much in this claim and there are many other sayings of Jesus that deserve to be looked at closely to see their implications for our daily lives and provide us with many reasons to recognise that Jesus is both fully God and fully man and we can safely trust our lives now into His hands and He can be trusted to bring us safely to heaven when our lives end - whether that is sooner or later.

As this Covid Christmas 2021 is coming to an *end* (even though there is another Christmas themed message this evening) I pray we all have had our best ever Christmas - even though it was a Covid curtailed Christmas and as we go into 2021, it would be a happy, healthy and prosperous year for us all and our loved ones. Most of all I pray that none of us would walk in darkness, but in the love-light of the **comfort, hope, revelation, instruction, salvation** and therefore the **truth** of the Lord Jesus and that our lives would be the sweeter and more blessed because of such.