

## The Light of Christmas

When I was a child my parents had a Christmas tree in our apartment bedecked with real candles. A few evenings before Christmas my dad would light the candles, turn off the ceiling lamp, and while singing Christmas carols we would watch the flames slowly consume the wax.

I don't know of anyone today who still decorates their Christmas tree with real candles. In the interests of safety and convenience strings of indoor and outdoor lights decorate trees and homes. Many people even take neighbourhood tours to look at the light displays some homes feature.

We associate Christmas with candles, lights, carolling, presents, good food, parties, and happy children. But that overshadows the reason for the season completely. Christmas is not a reminder that the world is a nice old place after all. It reminds us vividly and frankly that the world is a shockingly wicked place, where evil abounds unchecked, where children are murdered, where governments promote gambling, where arms dealers in first world countries make money selling weapons to underdeveloped nations unable to provide adequate food and health care for their citizens, and where in large cities people are afraid to go to the corner store after dark.

Christmas is God lighting a candle; and you don't light a candle in full daylight. You light it in a room that is so dingy and dark that the candle, when lit, reveals clearly how things really are. Christmas, then, is not a time for nostalgia and fuzzy feelings. Christmas is the reality, which shows the world where it is at.

Christmas is about Jesus Christ, who is the true light that gives light to every human being (John 1:9). And Jesus said of Himself, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12). Christmas is more than commercialized celebration of the birth of a man who changed the course of history. We might still ask:

*Who is this so weak and helpless,  
Child of low Hebrew maid?  
There is one answer, and one answer only –  
Tis the Lord, the King of glory.*

That is the wondrous truth of the first Christmas. The child born in Bethlehem is the only begotten Son of God, the Father, the One through whom all was created, the One who died on the cross, rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven. This Jesus is the light of the world and all reality makes sense only in His light.

Christ alone is the true Light that overcomes the darkness. Sadly, people will always mistake surrogate lights for the real one. Take a few current examples.

One light that people followed as their guide, particularly in the 19th century and well into this one, was the light of "progress." This view was partially impacted by the theory of evolution. People were dreaming of a better world; a world where, through better education and diplomacy, wars would be no more. The developments in science and technology would eventually benefit all. People followed this light by the droves. But two world wars and the many smaller wars fought since have shattered this dream of progress.

Today many North Americans are disillusioned and discontent. For the first time in recent history, young people are no longer convinced that the world is becoming a better place in which to live. They worry about the environment and a lack of jobs. They are no longer convinced that science will be able to solve the tremendous problems plaguing our times.

One light people still pursue is the light of material prosperity. Consumerism creates wants, promotes the idea that happiness is found in an ever increasing pay check, a second car, a Caribbean cruise, a cottage, and lengthy vacations. Of course, prosperity is better than abject poverty and unemployment. But money alone has never made anyone happy.

Materialism has failed to bring peace of heart, overcome anxiety and bring fulfillment. People may have gained materially but have lost spiritually. Chasing after materialism for satisfaction is like chasing after the wind. Look at the consequences of the current preoccupation with materialism - family breakdown, high divorce rates, and latchkey children.

Stackhouse observed in a *Maclean's* magazine interview: "There seems to be a cultural exhaustion after the Me decade of the 70s and the Me-too decade of the 80s. Almost everywhere you look there is a sense that things are really wrong, that the price we've paid for material prosperity is too high... People are looking for the transcendent."

When Jesus came into the world He lit up the darkness and brought pure hope. The world's lights cannot provide what people need most - satisfaction for spiritual hunger. The place where men and women can find proper illumination for themselves and about life is Jesus. As the true Light He is able to guide them through the darkest night and help them distinguish between false and true, good and poor lights. Next to Jesus, the perfect Son of God, all people are shown to be inadequate and morally dirty. The Bible says that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64: 6).

When you let Jesus the Light shine upon you, you will discover and acknowledge the dark side of your life, and see the need for His light to cleanse and change you. And consequently, Christmas will have a new meaning for you as you then no longer walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

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