

12/24/16 BUCYRUS UMC - CHRISTMAS EVE MEDITATION

“THE LIGHT” Pastor Mike Corwin

Text: John 1:1-5

I - CHRISTMAS LIGHTS:

One of the traditions my family had as I was growing up was to go out and see all the Christmas lights. We would pile in to the car with mom and dad and spend an hour or two driving around and looking at all the light that decorated people's houses and yards. When I grew up and had my own children, I kept that tradition going and it seemed to make them feel as good about the holiday as I did when I was their age. I remember doing my scouting each evening as I drove around in a police cruiser so I knew where to take them to see the best lights.

Lights are a big part of our holiday celebration, aren't they? Some of you still have this tradition of looking at the lights. Some of you may be the ones who decorate your houses for the rest of us to see. We set up trees and string enough lights on them to illuminate the whole room. Some of our outdoor displays could be used to guide jetliners to a safe landing. We have lights of multiple colors and sizes. Some twinkle and others burn continuously. Our downtown is lit up with them during this Christmas season too, as are our store fronts. I've even seen battery operated Christmas light necklaces so you can glow all day while you are out and about doing your shopping.

My concern is that if we're not careful these lights could call us away from the true meaning of Christmas. It can call us away from the "THE" LIGHT of Christmas. Most of us would maybe think that the light of Christmas is a bright star in the sky that led the wise men to the place where Jesus was born. But I'm here to tell you tonight that the true light of Christmas was not the star...it was the child born in a stable and laid in a manger. He was the light the world had anticipated and waiting for.

II - TEXT:

The Christmas story in the Gospel of John doesn't have a virgin named Mary or a carpenter named Joseph. It doesn't tell us about the trip to Bethlehem or the stable which filled in for a maternity ward. It has no shepherds or angels. It has only Jesus! John just says...

JOHN 1:1-5 (NLT)

¹In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He existed in the beginning with God.

³God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

⁴The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

John tells us that this baby born this night is the Light of The World. He lets us know that Jesus was already with God before God even began creating the universe and our world. He even specifies that Jesus is God and through him everything was created.

What John is pointing out is that Jesus has three qualities we need to be aware of. Jesus is:

- Pre-existent
- Distinctive from all the rest of Creation
- Deity - He is God

It says that he brought light to everyone. Jesus was born to bring us a spiritual life like none that existed before and to bring us an eternal life that he would do as he made a way for the forgiveness of our sins.

III - THE LIGHT:

But it's verse 5 that we need to remember and understand:

*⁵The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

To understand this fully we have to go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, the book of Genesis where the opening account of the creation story tells us that the earth was covered by chaos and darkness, and then God spoke...used the Word...and created light which extinguished the darkness. You see God did not create darkness - it already existed. He created the light to combat it. Even at night he made stars and a moon to keep it at bay. Darkness is the absolute absence of light.

This is a vision of the battle between Good and Evil. Evil is the darkness...Good is the light. God from the very beginning has tried to bathe the Creation and all his children - you and me - in goodness...in the light.

But we did not hold on to the light as God wanted us too. Darkness started with the first man and woman who sinned in the garden. And it gained ground until humankind and the creation was fully broken and covered in the darkness of sin.

It was on this night that God set into motion his plan to bring light back to those who wanted it. He sent "THE" LIGHT to earth. The same light who had existed with him in heaven at the beginning of Creation put on human skin and was born in a stable, laid in a manger, and surrounded by smelly animals, strange shepherds, and singing angels. That baby grew up and became the one who brought us the message of light, the message of a new Kingdom, and then sacrificed himself on a cross so we could find forgiveness and have eternal life by believing in him. They did not extinguish his light as they had hoped because three days later he was resurrected and his light has shown for over 2,000 years. Evil lost!

IV - LIVE IN THE LIGHT:

All of this means that you no longer have to live in darkness. You have been given a gift of life to extinguish your darkness. What darkness do you have?:

- Darkness in a relationship?
- Financial darkness?
- Darkness from your past?
- Darkness caused by health?
- Sexual darkness?
- Substance abuse darkness?
- Darkness brought on by anger or other behavioral problems?

And the list could go on for a long time.

But all you have to know is that you don't have to live in the darkness because the light of the world was born in Bethlehem and he was born for you. His light can overcome your darkness and it will never overcome the light of Jesus.

All you have to do is take that gift, freely given by God, unwrap it and make it a part of your life. To let Jesus into your hearts so his light will extinguish all of your darkness.

V - CANDLE LIGHTING / SPECIAL LIGHT:

As we prepare to celebrate the blessed birth of Jesus, our Lord and our Savior, this night I want to tell you something about another light. I have to share some information with you about how special our ceremony will be this night.

In Bethlehem there is a cave which was used as a stable in the days when Jesus was born. In 160AD it was identified by one of our early church fathers as the stable/cave where Jesus was born. In 327AD the Roman Emperor Constantine commissioned the Church of The Nativity to be built over the cave so it would always be protected and a place that Christians could go and worship Jesus. The church was completed in 339AD. It has gone through various work to keep it going over the years.

Sometime over a thousand years ago the monks who cared for the church lit some oil lamps to celebrate Christ's birth. Those lamps were staggered and lit in such a way that the flame would never go and it has been burning since those first lamps were lit. It has become an eternal flame. It has become known as "The Peace Light" as Jesus was the child born to bring us peace and is the "Prince of Peace."

In 1986 Austria started a program called the "PEACE LIGHT OF BETHLEHEM" as a mission project for handicapped people and other people in need. Every year since an Austrian child is selected and flown to Bethlehem to bring the light back in two blast proof miner lanterns. From there it is distributed to delegates from across Europe who take it back to their own countries with a message of peace. The light is transported by train, bus, car, and bicycle to be shared, especially with the elderly and sick who need some extra Christmas warmth. For the last 10 years this has been done by Ukrainian scouts.

In 2008 Austrian scouts flew that flame to the United States where they were met by scouts from various places and they took the light to various parts of our country. This has continued to this day as the Light of Christ has spread across our country.

My surprise for all of you this evening is tell you that "THE" light from the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem has made it to Bucyrus, Ohio. The flame we use to light the Christ candle this Christmas Eve is from that eternal light. We will not only use it to light the Christ candle, but will then use it to light all of your candles this night.

May the Light of Christ be eternal in your life and his Peace surround you in all that you do.

AMEN